

MEDIA BIAS - ANALYSIS PAPER Assignment



Lee McGaan, 2014

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Your first (individual) assignment involves analyzing one (or two) of the evening network newscasts. You should watch (and take careful notes on) one or more of these newscasts next week on assigned days:

- [CBS Evening News](#) (Mon, Sept. 22),
- [NBC Nightly News](#) (Thurs. Sept. 18 or Mon. Sept. 22)

The evening newscasts are available on the web sites linked above for as much as a week. You will have ample opportunity to watch any of the newscasts and watch them more than once. More than one viewing is necessary for you to do a good job on this assignment.

Your task is to analyze the news stories presented in the broadcast by using David Paletz's "Types of Bias" in news. You may supplement your analysis with materials taken from the chapter on "News as Persuasion" in Jamieson and Campbell's text (especially material concerning "dramatization"); however, use Paletz's structure as the basis for organizing your analysis. After viewing the newscast, pick several stories that show evidence of one or more types of bias. For each story you select to discuss:

- **Describe** (in considerable detail) **how the news item is presented** (e.g. how long, what visuals, what commentary, what lead, what conclusion, etc.).
- **Explain how that news item illustrates** one or several **forms of "bias,"** AND
- **Explain what influence the "bias" has on the viewer's understanding** of that news item, as best you can estimate.

Begin your paper with a brief introduction that describes the newscast and contains basic information (e.g. what was the lead story, what were the major stories, how many news items were presented all together, etc.). Conclude your paper with a discussion of any trends (in bias) you may have noticed throughout the newscast and on that network or on TV in general.

I expect a typical paper will be 4 - 7 pages - typed, double spaced. The number of stories you discuss and the number of types of bias you use will vary depending on which newscast you view and how much "depth" you achieve in the analysis. Some of you may do four or five stories - describing one type of bias for each. Some may see several types of bias in each of two or three stories. Some may compare and contrast the coverage on two networks of the one or two main stories of the day. I expect that the easiest types of bias to see on these newscasts will be "ordering," "drama," and "theme," but others will also be found in the newscasts. Keep your eyes open for the effects of camera angles, graphics, and other visual effects.

Papers will be graded on the following basis: how well you use the analytic terms (types of bias); how clear your descriptions of the story presentations are; how clear your explanations are of how the bias is presented and influenced the viewer; how well-organized the paper is; how thoughtful/insightful the analysis is; how good the overall quality of your writing is.

Form Bias: ordering, drama, aggressive interviewers, access, visual technique.

Mental Bias: themes, definition of news, knowledge, source influence

DUE DATE: Thursday, Sept. 25, in class

Alternative Media Messages for Analysis

While the use of news stories taken from the broadcast networks evening newscast is the most straightforward approach to completing this assignment, other kinds of media news sources are available and could make for an interesting paper. Some alternatives you might use are:

- The **front page of a major daily newspaper** (or a specific news section, e.g. international, financial, etc.) such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Chicago Tribune, or Washington Post.
- **Cable news programs** that include news and video such as CNN Prime News or Anderson Cooper 360. (Avoid shows such as The O'Reilly Factor or Rachel Maddow as they tend to have too little news content and too much opinion for effective use in this assignment).
- **BBC World News America** - (Tell me the date you will watch IN ADVANCE.)

Anyone who wishes to use an alternative media site for this assignment must get approval from the instructor **and** make arrangements to provide the instructor with the media messages used in the analysis (so I can see what you are describing).