

(LECTURERS: More than is usually the case, you'll want to rehearse this with an eye on the time. This lecture is designed to be continued in our recitations. We like to conclude with the series of slides on the Pregnant man and then a deconstruction of the Texting report that opens the hour. Also, make arrangements to turn lecture hall lights back on at those times when students are reading.)

You'll want to have your Deconstruction Workbook out and ready today, as we'll be working from it.

ASK: I know what I think...but as a lecturer who is offended that students tear themselves away from my fascinating class to tend their cellphone, I may be victim to effects of cognitive dissonance...But what do you think?

- Is too much texting a mental illness?
 - Do you text excessively?
 - How about your friends or family members?
 - Do they have a texting mental illness?
- (Show the video. It launches from next slide)



NEWSFELLOW: NEWS FELLOW: LINK (INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT "START AUTOMATICALLY"
run-time 1:50

(After it runs)

ASK: What do you think of this?

How do you react? With disbelief or skepticism?

What more do you need to know?

Can you make a reasoned assessment of its reliability?

We are now at the nitty-gritty of News Literacy, taking news reports apart and examining the reliability of the information. We call it Deconstruction.

Using the Deconstruction Workbook you brought to class today, we will examine a series of stories piece-by-piece.

Does the headline match the story? Does the lead (summary paragraph) spell out the main points?

We'll look at the difference between verification, assertion and inference.

How's the evidence in each story? Is it direct or indirect? Does the reporter "Open the Freezer?"

Does the reporter place this tiny report in its appropriate context so that you're neither lost in the forest nor hugging a lone anomalous tree?

Does the reporter provide transparency...admitting what the reporter doesn't know and why not and how the reporter found out the key points?

We will almost certainly not have time to do all the examples in the workbook. You'll keep working on these in recitation.

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News Matters

Programs at risk	Tax breaks for the wealthy
\$11.2 billion Early childhood programs	\$11.5 billion Per-year cost of recent tax cuts for millionaires' estates
\$8.9 billion Low-income housing programs	\$8.9 billion Cost of allowing mortgage interest deduction for vacation homes (est. 10-year cost)
\$7.6 billion Supplemental nutrition for poor families (WIC)	\$6.7 billion Cost of "estate planning" techniques used by wealthy to avoid taxes
\$4.6 billion Teacher training and afterschool programs	\$5.2 billion Cost of removing limit on itemized deductions for high-income taxpayers, FY 2011
\$4.1 billion Job training for unemployed and new workers	\$4.1 billion Cost of tax breaks for offshore operations of U.S. financial companies

Animation: Image and text fade in together

SLIDE: NEWS MATTERS PROMO

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News Matters

Uninstalling Dictators, please wait...

TUNISIA		100% done
EGYPT		100% done
LIBYA		In progress...
YEMEN		In progress...
BAHRAIN		In progress...
MOROCCO		Plugin needed
IRAN		Please wait...
ITALY		Please wait...
BELGIUM		No operating system detected

PunditKitchen

Animation: Image and text fade in together

SLIDE: NEWS MATTERS PROMO



Holy Alerts...and Actionable Information, Batman!

Good Thing You Followed the Story, Robin! And Read A Selection of News Outlets, Not Just The Same Old Stuff!

You might be upset to learn that texted donations can take months to reach a trouble spot.

Texting worked well for Haiti Earthquake Relief, when people gave 25 million dollars and the carriers handed off the money to Haiti immediately. But for Japan, the money might not get there until three months later. Why?

Because Japan has been deemed a non-emergency situation by text service carriers.

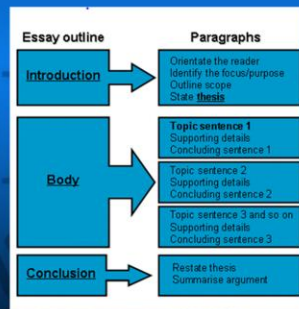
Techy sites like Gizmodo and some sites aimed at the Non-Profit world reported this, but it got only a passing mention in an Associated Press story.

<http://gizmodo.com/#!5785319/why-it-might-take-three-months-for-your-text-donations-to-get-to-japan>

<http://activistfaith.org/2011/03/15/help-stop-the-delay-of-text-donations-to-japan/>

The Essay

Due @ Your Last Recitation




We'll hand out the prompt in a week or so. For now, it would benefit you to review the lessons from Writing 101 and to budget time to write a scholarship-winning essay. Because, as Professor Miller will tiresomely repeat and repeat: "There is no such thing as good writing. Only good rewriting."
(Twain)

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My Life As...

An Investigative Reporter and Author: Scott Higham '82

Monday, May 2, 7:30 p.m., Javits




Our next My Life As speaker is Scott Higham, a 1982 graduate of Stony Brook whose latest book dissects spectacular news media mistakes in the reporting on the death of congressional intern Chandra Levy. His day job is investigative reporter at The Washington Post.

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Countdown To Test #2

Held in Recitation Next Week.
Emphasizes Lectures 7-11,
(Fairness & Bias through
Power of Images)
...but requires some use of
concepts from Test 1.
Same format: 10 questions,
100 points possible.



Lecturer should know the date of the Test #2 recitations in her/his lecture.



SLIDE: DECONSTRUCTING THE NEWS.

This week, we learn and practice a step-by-step process for pulling apart news stories of all kinds to assess their reliability.

Remember, that's the point of this course: not to make you a cynical smart-aleck, but to prepare you to lead your family, your workplace and your community by skillfully finding reliable information...information that is actionable.

The Deconstruction Work book includes a series of stories that illustrate the value of this deconstruction process.

We will almost certainly not have time to do all the examples in Lecture, so this process will continue in recitation.

Past students say this lesson sticks with them long after the final exam...annoys them...makes them read slower...deconstruct TV stories out loud instead of zoning out...to which we say YES!

A word to the wise: most of your grade on the final will rest on your ability to deconstruct with precision and sophistication, using all of the concepts, skills and vocabulary learned this semester.

Note the stories are not all perfect examples; they are the result of daily journalism like you will consume for the rest of your life.

In the next three slides I'm going to introduce to you the method by which you break a story down into its parts in order to judge its reliability.

We call this deconstruction.

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A Deconstruction Worksheet

How to Judge Reliability

- 1) Summarize the main points: Does the headline and the lead support the main point(s)?
- 2) How close does the reporter come to opening the freezer? Is the evidence direct or indirect?

You can't do all eight steps of the deconstruction process on every story you read in your life.

But when the topic really matters to you and you're getting ready to make decision or take action...you better be sure you're working from reliable information.

Here's how:

1. Summarize the main points of the story.

Do the headline and lede support the main point(s) of the story?

2. Assess the evidence supporting the main points of the story. Is Direct? Indirect? How close did the reporter come to opening the freezer?

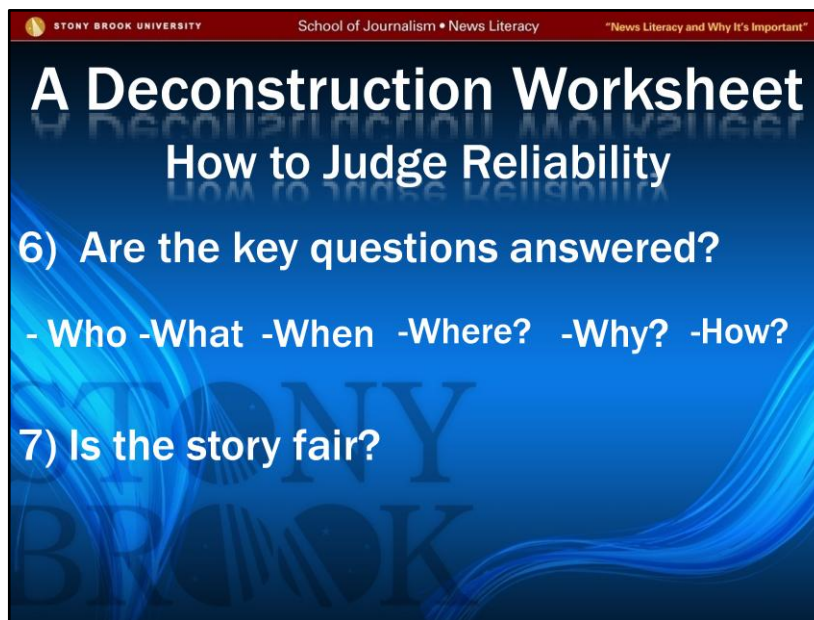
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A Deconstruction Worksheet

How to Judge Reliability

- 3) Evaluate the reliability of the sources using I'M VA/IN
- 4) Does the reporter make his/her work transparent?
- 5) Does the reporter place the story in context?

3. Are the sources reliable? (Are you reacting to them, or analyzing them?)
5. Does the reporter make his or her work transparent? How does the reporter know what is being reported?
6. Does the reporter place the story in context?

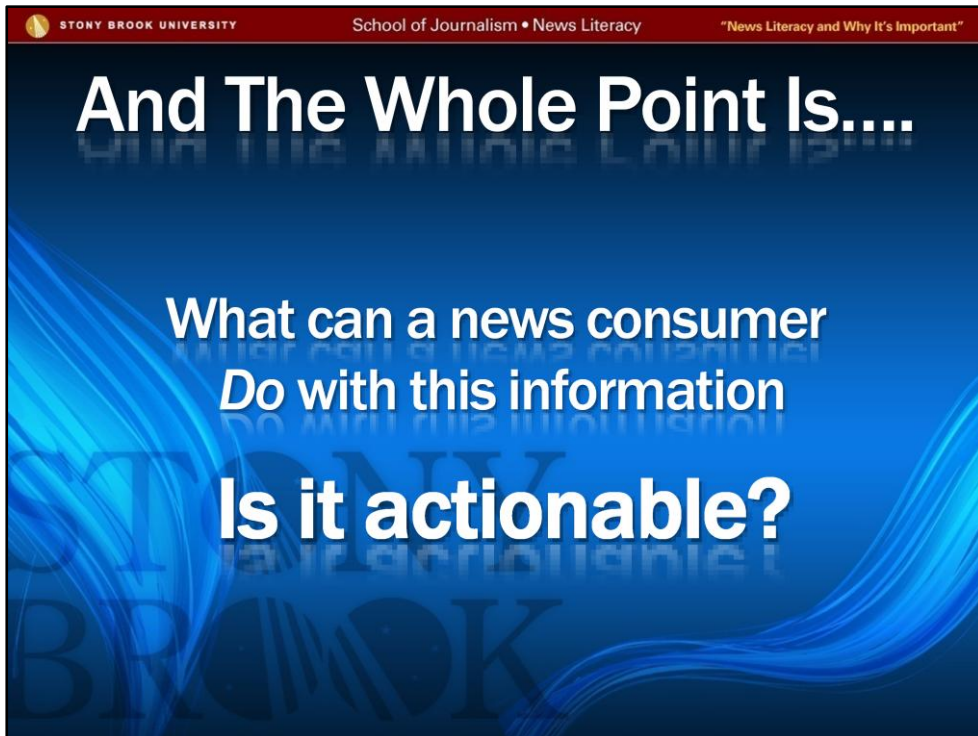


(ANIMATION: who, what, when where, why, who all fade in, in succession.)

Are the key questions answered? (And what is left out.)

Is the story balanced? Should it be? Is it fair to the evidence and to key stakeholders?

When the information matters because you're going to make a decision, take action or share it with others...these questions matter.



Again, the point of this process is not to make you an insufferable smart-alek. It is to help you find reliable information to:

- Make a decision
- Take action
- Make a judgment
- Share with others

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Deconstructing the News

The power of Context

However, behind the image of two-year-old Jingdan lies a tale not of intentional cruelty but, it seems, one of misplaced love and fear: his sister disappeared from the same spot just two weeks ago.

"I was afraid I would lose him too," their father, Chen Chuanliu, said today.



(Animation: Each click brings up another element: Photo, Headline, Pull quote.)

Before we go through point-by-point, we need to address two terms that students stumble over.

Context and Transparency.

For starters, here is a simple example of context.

You see a photo of a toddler chained to a tree.

What do you think?


(click up headline)

Reporter Tania Branigan in Beijing interviews the father, who says his daughter was abducted, so while he must work, he chains up the boy, Jingdan.

(click up pull-quote) Does that change how you see the photo? That is context, what you might call "The Rest of the Story."

As a news consumer, if you don't look for context, you can miss the story.

Key Definitions

Main Entry: **con·text** 

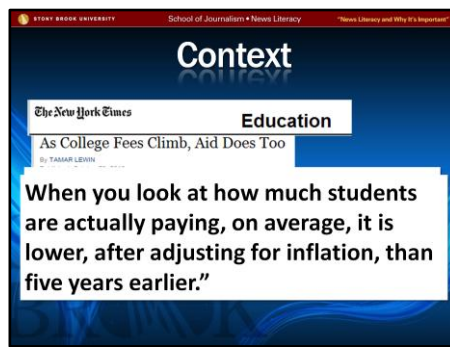
Pronunciation: \ˈkän-,ˈtekst\

Function: *noun*

Context: Facts that surround an event or elements of a news story and provide meaning or significance

Here's a simple definition.

Let's look at some more examples.



(Animation: First headline, then scary data graph about costs rising, then graphs that show aid grew faster than costs for a net reduction in payouts by students)

Now, here's a more nuanced example.

The headline starts your ulcer.

But then there's this fact about aid increasing.

And finally this analysis. Payouts have dropped for students.

Wow...Does context ever matter. If you had the fees data alone, it would be a very different story than this.

(Lecturer: FYI:

October 28, 2010

As College Fees Climb, Aid Does Too

By [TAMAR LEWIN](#)

As their state financing dwindled, four-year public universities increased their published tuition and fees almost 8 percent this year, to an average of \$7,605, according to the [College Board's](#) annual reports. When room and board are included, the average in-state student at a public university now pays \$16,140 a year.

At private nonprofit colleges and universities, tuition rose 4.5 percent to an average of \$27,293, or \$36,993 with room and board.

The good news in the 2010 "Trends in College Pricing" and "Trends in Student Aid" reports is that fast-rising tuition costs have been accompanied by a huge increase in financial aid, which helped keep down the actual amount students and families pay.

"In 2009-2010, students got \$28 billion in Pell grants, and that's \$10 billion more than the year before," said Sandy Baum, the economist who is the lead author of the reports. "When you look at how much students are actually paying, on average, it is lower, after adjusting for inflation, than five years earlier."

In the last five years, the report said, average published tuition and fees increased by about 24 percent at public four-year colleges and universities, 17 percent at private nonprofit four-year institutions, and 11 percent at public two-year colleges — but in each sector, the net inflation-adjusted price, taking into account both grants and federal tax benefits, decreased over the period.

Almost everybody has been helped by the federal government's increased spending on education, Ms. Baum said, either through Pell grants, which provide an average of \$3,600 for low-income students, or through tax credits, which go further up the income scale.

The increase in federal support this year was so large that unlike former years, government grants surpassed institutional grants.

"I think that's an aberration," Ms. Baum said. "Pell grants are unlikely to grow so rapidly in the coming years, and institutional grants are likely to grow, so I think the ratio will flip back."

This year, the report found, full-time students receive an average of about \$6,100 in grant aid and federal tax benefits at public four-year institutions, \$16,000 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$3,400 at public two-year colleges.

Truncated here....

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/28/education/28college.html>

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Deconstructing the News

NewScientist
Shower of dead birds: apocalypse or accident?

It's worth keeping in mind just how many birds there are when thinking about so-called mass die-offs. "Five billion birds die in the U.S. every year," Ms. Driscoll said, "so statistically some have to die at the same time." The population of red-winged blackbirds is more than 200 million, she said, and they fly in flocks of 100,000 to 2 million. "So 5,000 sounds like a lot of birds, but really it is a relative number."



(Animation: Click brings up the context quote)

When 5,000 red-winged blackbirds fell dead on New Year's Eve in Arkansas and 500 more in Louisiana, people went looking for connections and villains.

Conspiracy theories arose, environmental explanations were proposed...But this piece of context was essential to understanding the cause. (Which turned out to be blunt force trauma, likely caused by startled birds (fireworks on New Years Eve) crashing into each other and immovable objects like wires, buildings and trees.

In a first-day story about an unusual event, it pays to make sure you have the context...

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/04/us/04beebe.html>

<http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/shortsharpscience/2011/01/happy-new-year-its-raining-bir.html>



(This example is better suited to Recitation, but it's very effective if you decide to take time in lecture)

Does the reporter place the story in context?

Let's see....Two counties is 3% of the 62...but %10 percent of the car thefts?

How many of you drive to school or have a car? Well, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports, a motor vehicle is stolen in the United States every 26.4 seconds.

(Look at watch, wait 26 seconds, say "There goes one now!")

The FBI also calculates the odds of a vehicle being stolen were 1 in 207 in the latest study. So...how many cars in the lot west of here?

Furthermore, the odds are highest in urban areas like this Tri-state area....And I thought you should know that more than one in ten of the cars stolen in all 62 counties of New York State are stolen right here on Long Island...

How are you commuters feeling?... Can you remember if you looked your car?

If you leave, though, you'll miss this context...The car theft rate is the highest in the Western U.S., almost a full third higher than the US average. And the theft rate for the Northeast is about half the US average. And the car theft rate for Long Island? It's about one third the U.S. average. ...But, but, but...what about "*more than one in ten of the cars stolen in all 62 counties of New York State are stolen right here on Long Island*"?

That is true, but while Long Island accounts for about 15 percent of the state's population, it only sees about a tenth of the car thefts, so car theft is rare on Long Island, relative to almost anywhere in the country...

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Key Definitions

Main Entry: **trans·par·en·cy** 🗣️
Pronunciation: \tran(t)s-'per-ən(t)-sē\
Function: *noun*
Inflected Form(s): *plural trans·par·en·cies*
Date: 1591

Transparency: The reporter specifies in the story what he or she *does not* know, and why it could not be learned; how they know what they do know; when the reporter pulls the curtain aside.

Step 5: Does the reporter make his or her work transparent?

Definition of transparent: Specifying in a story what you do not know or could not learn. For example: It could not be learned. He or she could not be reached for comment.

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Deconstructing the News

Some Common Transparencies

- "Could not be reached"
- "Requested anonymity because she feared losing her job"
- "A reporter attempted to contact the family at home, but no one came to the door."
- "The information could not be independently verified."



Rather than get into the subtleties of transparency in a specific story, let's start with a memorable image: This exploded diagram of a camera shows what is under the shiny case.

That's what transparency is: The journalist letting you see what's inside.

Here is a list of common statements by which journalists make their work transparent...open to the public:

--Could not be reached

--Requested anonymity because she feared for her job.

--A reporter tried to contact the family at their home, but no one came to the door.

-The information could not be independently verified.

We'll circle back to this concept.



Point of this image is this: If your car is a Toyota , you want it to have a Toyota engine, Toyota brakes and Toyota steering wheel, not a shiny but mismatched part from a Chevy.

Same goes for a reliable news report. If the Headline and Lead are not matched to the story, you should be concerned.

SO, STEP 1: SUMMARIZE THE STORY

1. What are the main points?

A well-made, reliable story will have a headline and “lead” that match the facts.

One useful definition: The Lead is often the first paragraph and should generally give the main point of the story . Sometimes the lead is delayed because the reporter uses an anecdote to set the scene or hook the reader. Even then, there is usually still one paragraph, a bit further into the story, which gives you a summary of the main points. A hyped-up headline or lead is a warning sign: this report is more interested in gathering an audience than delivering reliable information.

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Deconstructing the News

How Reliable is the Headline?

Assaults Plague Campus

On October 17, 2006, Peter Baigent, the Vice President of Student Affairs sent an e-mail to the entire university informing students, staff and faculty of the recent sexual assault of two female students.

According to Douglas Little, Assistant Chief of the Stony Brook Police Department, the two men allegedly involved with the assault are known to the police. Little commented, "Both the Suffolk County police and Stony Brook Police departments are working on the case together."

When asked about the safety of the campus community with respect to this recent incident, Little responded, "There is no threat to the campus community."

an e-mail to the entire university informing students, staff and faculty of the recent sexual assault of two female students.

The [two] women were very courageous, and the university has given them 100% support." Little was unable to provide any information about the location of the attack on campus because of possible violations of the privacy of the two female students.

Aside from this recent incident, students also have the ability to become involved with the pro-active measures set in place by the university to minimize the occurrence of such attacks.

Is the Headline Supported By the Story?

(Animation: Click a 2nd time to bring up pull quote)

Turn to page 1, example 1 in the workbook
Assaults Plague campus.

The words intended to make you stop and read a story are the Headline, the stuff in big letters, and the "lead," a summary sentence that tells you what the story is about .

ASK: Does this headline accurately summarize the story?

(It does not. Discuss why it does not.)

Stony Brook enrollment is approximately 22,000. What rate of crime per 1,000 students would constitute a plague?

ASK: Is the campus "plagued?"

Is this reliable information?



(Animation: Click for the WAPo headline, then click again for the main points)

The lead is often the very first paragraph, although some writers start with an anecdote or some scene-setting before they slip the “Lead” in.

So...

Turn to page 2 and read the story you find there.

(Wait)

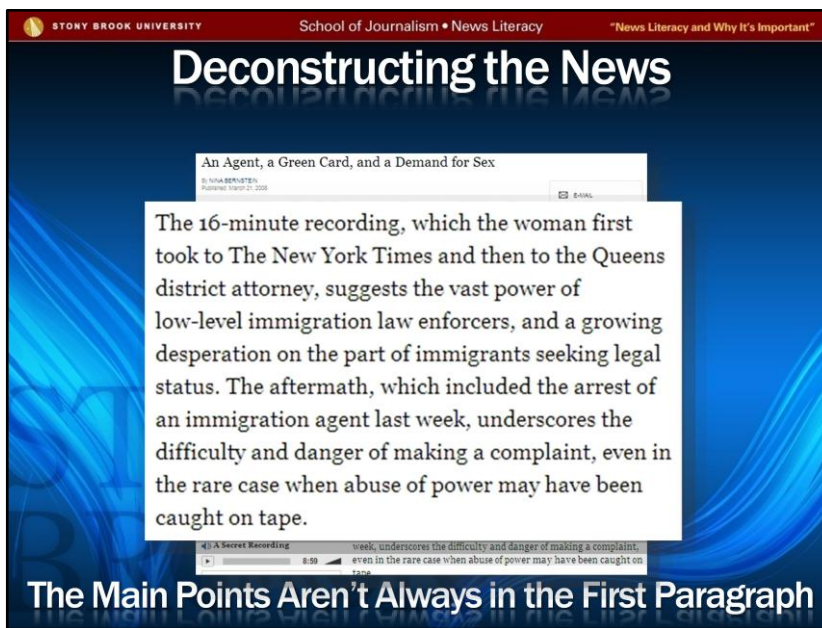
Ask: What’s the headline?

What does the “lead” tell you?

Is there any word in the headline that concerns you (Could?)

Conditional language can be kind of weasly. Watch out for that. If the headline writer feels the need to qualify a story right from the start, how reliable is it likely to be?

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/20/AR2010102003372.html>



(Animation: Don't click yet)

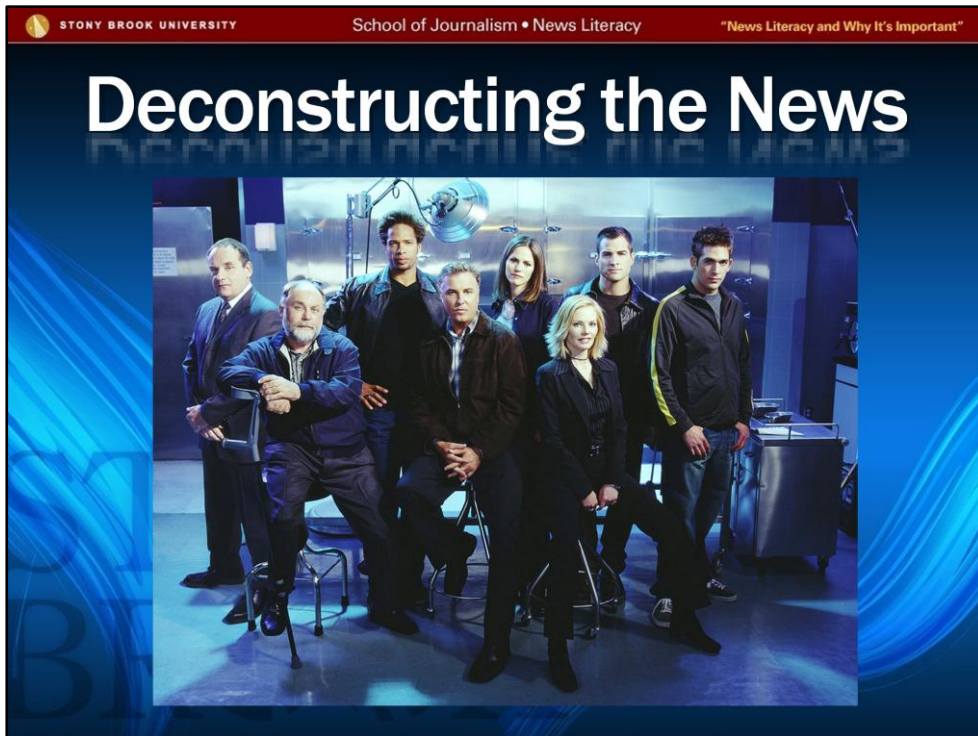
Turn to page 3, **example 3** In your workbook and read the story you find there. We're going to use it several times, so read it well.

ASK: What is the main point of this story?

Where did you find it? (In the 5th and 6th paragraphs.)

This is an example of a delayed lead.

Sometimes a reporter uses an anecdote to begin the story but then you should find a summary paragraph (journalists call it the Nut of the Story or Nut Graph) that tells you what the main points of the story are.



In the lecture on Truth and Verification, we talked about the importance of judging the quality of the evidence for yourself.


Is it direct?

Indirect?

Are assertions going about naked, with no evidence to give them dignity?

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Deconstructing the News



2) Assess the evidence supporting the main points of the story.

In the lecture on Truth and Verification, we talked about the importance of judging the quality of the evidence for yourself.

Is it direct?


Indirect?

Are assertions going about naked, with no evidence to give them dignity?

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Assessing Evidence

Radiation level falls at Japan Fukushima plant: agency



(Reuters) - The level of radiation detected at the Tokyo Electric Power Co Fukushima plant has fallen steadily over the past 12 hours, an official at Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency said on Thursday.

A level of 752 ~~microsieverts~~ microsieverts per hour was recorded at the plant's main gate at 5 p.m. (0800 GMT) on Wednesday, said the official, Tetsuo Ohmura. The monitoring point was then changed to the plant's west gate and readings were taken every 30 minutes, he said. At 5 a.m. the reading was 338 ~~microsieverts~~ microsieverts per hour. That level was still much higher ~~than~~ it should be, but was not dangerous, and that by comparison absorption of a level of 400 was normal from being outside over the course of a year, Ohmura said.

(Reporting by ~~Terril~~ Terril Jones)

Take a look at Workbook **Example #4** on page 4:

ASK: What kind of evidence is provided, direct or indirect?

(There will likely be a debate, but Geiger Counter readings are a form of direct evidence.)



(Animation: Mildly creepy...Question mark on a meat-hook swings out)

DID THE REPORTER OPEN THE FREEZER?

You recall the story of the New Orleans reporter who flinched from examining the freezer in the Convention Center that was supposed to be full of murder victims... and got the story wrong.

This course asks the question...How close does the reporter come to “opening the freezer? “ as a way to think about whether the story is based on direct or indirect evidence.

Just because a story relies on indirect evidence does not mean it is a weak story.

Often, that is the only evidence available.

But the news consumer should be aware when the story rests on eyewitnesses, when it rests on second-hand information.

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Deconstructing the News

An Agent, a Green Card, and a Demand for Sex

The 16-minute recording, which the woman first took to The New York Times and then to the Queens district attorney, suggests the vast power of low-level immigration law enforcers, and a growing

Money, not sex, is the more common currency of corruption in immigration, but according to Congressional testimony in 2006 by Michael Maxwell, former director of the agency's internal investigations, more than 3,000 backlogged complaints of employee misconduct had gone uninvestigated for lack of staff, including 528 involving criminal allegations.

Evidence: Did the reporter open the freezer?

(Animation: Each click brings up the next element)

Back to **example 3**

(Don't click yet, but each click brings up another)

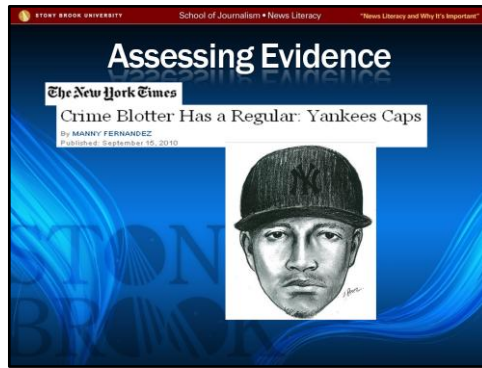
ASK: Where is the evidence? What kind is it?

ASK: How close did the reporter come to opening the freezer

Let students bring this out:

1. On the tape, the 16-minute recording.
2. Confirmed in congressional testimony by a named official, Michael Maxwell.
3. Statistics re: complaints back up point 3,000 pending misconduct complaints.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/21/nyregion/21immigrant.html>



Now let's read Workbook **Example #5** .:

ASK: What kind of evidence does the reporter collect? (Direct or indirect)

With that evidence:

- Can you conclude Yankees hat cause criminal behavior?
- Can you conclude all criminals wear Yankees hats?
- Can you conclude dumb criminals, the ones who get caught, wear Yankees hats?

What phrase have you learned about this common trap people fall into when they assume they have all the right facts? (Correlation does not equal causation...flawed inference.)


I think you could call that a context problem, by the way. If you don't have the whole picture, you may draw a faulty inference.


And if you conclude from this that all inference is flawed...you're ignoring the fact that most criminal investigation and scientific endeavor relies at least in part on Inductive reasoning built on sturdy three-part inferences like this: All Men are Mortal; Socrates is a Man; Socrates is Mortal.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/16/nyregion/16caps.html>

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Be Careful of Inference

Main Entry: **ev·i·dence** 
Pronunciation: \ˈe-və-dən(t)s, -və-,den(t)s\
Function: *noun*
Date: 14th century

Main Entry: **in·fer·ence** 
Pronunciation: \in-f(ə-)rən(t)s, -fərn(t)s\
Function: *noun*
Date: 1594

Evidence: Information that proves or disproves something

Inference: Taking information that is accepted as true and then drawing a conclusion that may or may not be valid

Evidence is information that proves or disproves something

Inference is an assertion that suggests a conclusion or relationship. To be sound, the assumptions must be accurate AND the connections must be carefully made.

Aka: Correlation does not equal causation.

Aka: Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc: Latin for "*after this, therefore because (on account) of this*" commonly referred to as a *logical fallacy* .



Now let's look at Workbook **Example #6** : Pulling all-nighters can lower GPA.

(Click brings up quote with data)

“Certainly the evidence is out there showing that short sleep duration absolutely interferes with concentration....” says one source...and then there's this study (CLICK NOW)

But does that mean all-nighters equate to lower grades?

OR...are lower GPA students more likely to pull all nighters.

Or...what are other possible conclusions?

Solid evidence is one thing.

Inductive reasoning, however, is dangerous if you don't understand Fallacy: which is the study of common thinking errors such as confusing correlation for causation.

http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/discoveries/2007-12-14-all-nighters-gpa_N.htm



Because most stories rely on interviews, news consumers looking for reliable information need to evaluate sources.

TO REITERATE A KEY POINT...In the past, some students have mistakenly applied an all-or-nothing standard. Any source who failed just one of the sourcing guidelines was ruled unreliable.

It's rarely that clear, which is why we have given you five rules for weighing sources.

If someone's an eye-witness, odds are good they are also a participant. That doesn't mean they're unreliable, but it does suggest you proceed carefully.

If someone's authoritative about a company, they're likely an employee, investor or competitor and therefore self-interested. But if the information they provide is verifiable, they may be a reliable source.

The point is, you're smart enough to take all this into account and make a nuanced judgment of reliability.



Judging the Reliability of Sources

1) **I**ndependent Sources Are Better Than Self-Interested Sources

2) **M**ultiple Sources Are Better Than Single Sources

3) Sources Who **V**erify Are Better Than Sources Who Assert

4) **A**uthoritative/**I**nformed Sources Are Better Than Uninformed Sources

5) **N**amed Sources Are Better Than Unnamed Sources

*(Mnemonic Device: **I'M VAIN**)*

(ANIMATION: Each bullet point comes in (quickly) on the click. Instead of fading in, they fly in, just to keep the students awake.)

Just a reminder.

Here's how we evaluate sources in News Literacy.



Back to Example 4.

So, other than trusting the reporter's judgment that Tetsuo Ohmura belongs in this report what can you do?

ASK: Use the I'M VA/IN analysis.

Let's have a volunteer

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/16/us-japan-quake-level-idUSTRE72F9K720110316>


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Deconstructing the News

How to Assess Source Authority

Experts Had Long Criticized Potential Weakness in Design of Stricken Reactor

By TOM ZELLER Jr.



"Not banning them might be the end of nuclear power," said Mr. Lochbaum, a nuclear engineer who spent 17 years working in nuclear facilities, including three that used the G.E. design.

Is the Source Authoritative? Independent?

Why or Why Not?

(Animation: click brings up GE Engineer)

Let's review Example 10.

ASK: Use the I'M VA/IN analysis.

How Much Weight do you give this source: None, Little, Some, A Great Deal

Why?

Is the story reliable?

What other problem do you see.

(Reporter is utterly opaque about graph after graph of context. How does he know these things. Where could we verify them?)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/16/world/asia/16contain.html>



Deconstructing the News

How to Weigh Sources

New York Tour Bus Crash Kills 14 in New York



Shamel Bookard and Ashanti Jackson, friends of Oferdel Williams, the driver of the bus, described him as the kind of person who is likely overwhelmed with sadness at what happened.

"I'm sure he's greatly sorry for what did happen," Jackson told WABC-TV.

They said Williams is known for his courage.

"Years ago he ran into a burning building and saved a family, there was a girl, a grandmother in a wheelchair, he brought them out the fire," Bookard told WABC-TV.

Verification or Assertion?

(Animation: click brings up the friend's quotes)

Please turn to Example 7

ASK: What kind of source is Bookard?

How about Jackson?

Do they assert or verify?

Is this a reliable description?

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/14-killed-new-york-tour-bus-crash-police-search/story?id=13121602&page=2>


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Deconstructing the News

FG:CH News October 8, 2010, 11:05 AM


Cake Man Raven Closed by Health Department

By BRENDEN BECK, Community Contributor



The recent problems started at the beginning of the month, before the health inspection, said one employee, who did not want to be identified by name for fear of losing the job.

"Cake Man was late on his water bill, and because of that we weren't able to flush the toilets or wash our hands," said the employee... "Our permit wasn't renewed, our certificates saying we were allowed to handle food were fake."... The store has often been late to pay its staff in the last few months, the employee said.



Brenden Beck

The Health Department signs indicating that Cake Man Raven had been closed were obscured behind plants Thursday evening.

(Animation: click brings up excerpt of the anonymous employee)
Let's read Example 8

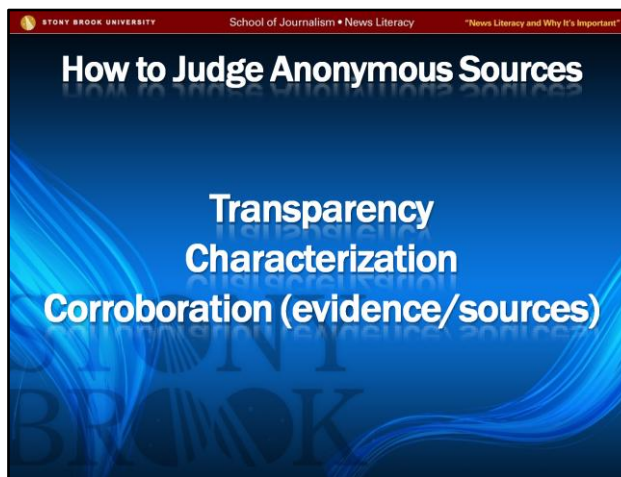
ASK: Would you give this source:

- No weight
- Little weight
- Some weight
- A great deal of weight

Why?

Is this a reliable story? What could you conclude from it?

<http://fort-greene.thelocal.nytimes.com/2010/10/08/cake-man-raven-closed-by-health-department/>



Anonymous sources present a number of challenges.

It's tempting to discount everything they say. They're not accountable for what they say and it's nearly impossible for a reader to judge if a nameless person is authoritative.

On the other hand, whistleblowers have exposed a great deal of dangerous, illegal or embarrassing behavior by government officials, corporate leaders and religious leaders.

So, other than trusting the reporter's judgment, what can you do?

Ask yourself these questions.

- Why is the person anonymous?
- Has the reporter offered information to demonstrate the person is informed?
- Is there any indication the person is self-interested?
- Does the source assert or verify?
- Is there any independent confirmation of what the source is saying? (Corroboration)

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Deconstructing the News

How to Assess Source Reliability

The New York Times

Criticism and Questions Over Plan to Move Macy's Thanksgiving Parade Out of Times Sq.

By NOAH ROSENBERG
Published: March 8, 2011

But some critics are skeptical. A community leader who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preserve his publicly neutral stance, said he was at a meeting with Macy's representatives last year, at which the retailer "threatened to move the parade to another city," unless the route changes were agreed upon.

How Do You Weigh the Anonymous Source?

Let's read Example 9

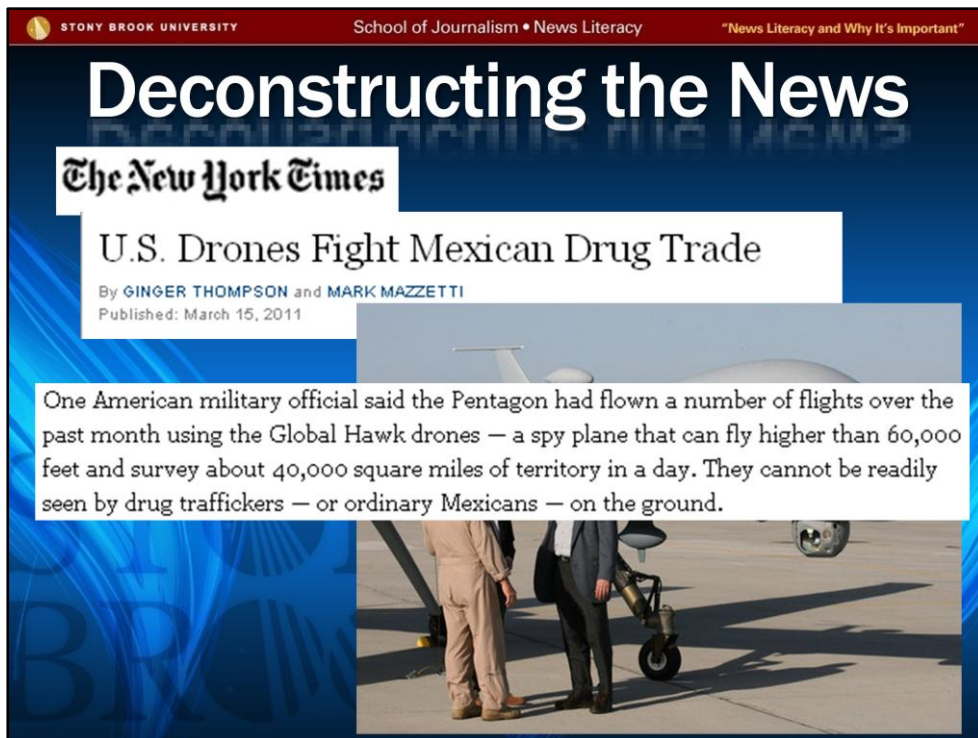
ASK: Would you give this source:

- No weight
- Little weight
- Some weight
- A great deal of weight

Why?

Is this a reliable story? What could you conclude from it?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/09/nyregion/09parade.html>



Let’s review Example 11

(Longish. Let them read)

ASK: Is this a reliable report?

Do you believe it?

How does this story, largely based on anonymous sources, differ from the Cake Man story? (multiple sources, mix of evidence, etc)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/16/world/americas/16drug.html>

Image comes from : http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/04/images/20070409-12_d-0119-1-515h.html

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Deconstructing the News



4) Does the reporter make his or her work transparent?

Where magic is made!
The Morley Candy Factory Tour

STEP 5: DOES THE REPORTER MAKE HIS OR HER WORK TRANSPARENT?

In the prior lecture we described the scientific method, which includes publication of research findings with detailed data, methodology, etc and encouraging other scientists to review it.

In journalism, one form of peer review is called transparency: telling how you know what you know and why you don't know what you don't know.

Think of it as a factory tour...the reporter showing you how the information was gathered...or why it was not available.. This allows you to judge their work, just like you'd judge the findings of a scientist. If someone else could go find the same material, the story is reliable.

Key Definitions

Main Entry: **trans·par·en·cy** 🗣️
Pronunciation: \tran(t)s-'per-ən(t)-sē\
Function: *noun*
Inflected Form(s): *plural trans·par·en·cies*
Date: 1591

Transparency: The reporter specifies in the story what he or she *does not* know, and why it could not be learned; how they know what they do know; when the reporter pulls the curtain aside.

Definition of transparent: Specifying in a story what you do not know or could not learn. For example: It could not be learned. He or she could not be reached for comment.

Deconstructing the News

How Transparent is the Story?



National Public Radio Reports from Basra

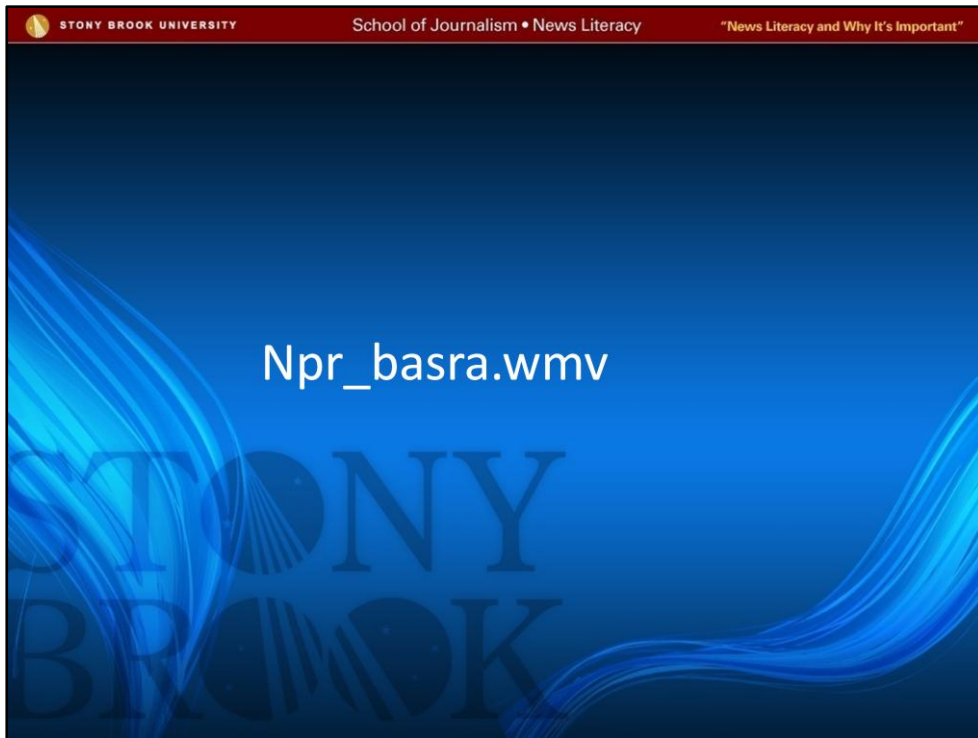
STEP 5: DOES THE REPORTER MAKE HIS OR HER WORK TRANSPARENT?

Here is an NPR report from Basra, (Iraq)

Listen for examples of transparency

Example: NPR report from Basra. Listen for the statements of what it cannot verify or know with certainty.

(Next slide launches audio, a really good example of real-time transparency in which she says what she doesn't know.)



NEWSFELLOW: NEWS FELLOW: LINK
(INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT
“START AUTOMATICALLY”

Runtime 2:40

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Deconstructing the News

Corrections are Institutional Transparency

The New York Times

Corrections

FRONT PAGE
An article on Saturday about the political donations of Paul Singer, a hedge fund manager, described imprecisely the source of significant contributions to the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Mr. Singer and others affiliated with his firm, Elliott Management, are collectively the top source of contributions to the committee, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, which collates campaign finance data. The hedge fund itself is not the committee's biggest source of money. (Under campaign finance rules, the firm cannot make such contributions.)
An article on Thursday about the perils of prescribing psychiatric drugs to young children misspelled, in one instance, the name of a Louisiana town that is home to a family whose son has been weaned off several such drugs. As the dateline correctly noted, they live in Opelousas, not Opelousas.

INTERNATIONAL
An article on Monday about the release of secret tapes showing that the former leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Belgium urged a man sexually abused by a bishop to keep silent for a year, until the bishop could retire, misstated the given name of the abuser. The retired bishop, who is the victim's uncle, is Roger Vangheluwe, not Robert.

NATIONAL
An article last Friday about the effort of Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates to reduce the number of generals and admirals in the United States military described incorrectly the method used to calculate retirement benefits in the military. Pensions are based on base pay — not on full pay, which can include extra money to cover, for example, the cost of food and housing.

BUSINESS DAY
An article on Wednesday about a new computer memory technology called the memristor overstated the expected capacity of advanced flash storage chips by 2014. It is 170 billion bits per square centimeter, not per square inch.

THE ARTS
An article on Tuesday about a dispute over whether a box of negatives bought at a garage sale are last work of Ansel Adams or at least partly the work of another photographer, Earl Brooks, misstated part of a comment by Arnold Peter, a lawyer for the man who bought the negatives. When told that an expert who originally attributed the negatives to Adams had changed his mind after viewing some photographs by Brooks, Mr. Peter said that "without possession of the negative, there is no evidence that Earl Brooks created the negative from which the prints were made." He did not say "without possession of the negative of the negative."

CROSSWORD
The crossword puzzle on Tuesday gave an erroneous clue for 5 Across, seeking the answer "ESTH" for the Bible's Book of Esther. The clue was incorrect because Esther is not the "only" book in the Bible that does not mention God. Neither does the Song of Solomon.

the paper's journalistic integrity can reach The Times's public editor, Art Brisbane, at public@nytimes.com or call (212) 556-7632.

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STEP 5: DOES THE REPORTER MAKE HIS OR HER WORK TRANSPARENT?


Point of this is that corrections are institutional transparency: here's what we got wrong.

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Deconstructing the News

Step 6:

Are the key questions answered?



One way to stay focused is to ask...are the key questions all answered?

Who, What, When, Where, Why and How are certainly a starting point.

Pay attention to questions that tug at you as you are watching or reading.

What's missing?

Gaps should either be explained (transparency) or you need to pay attention to them in judging a story.

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Deconstructing the News

The New York Times

Bronx Zoo Cobra Found Alive

Updated | 4:51 p.m.

She's been found!

An Egyptian cobra at the Bronx Zoo that had been missing for seven days was discovered "alive and well" on Thursday inside a nonpublic area of the zoo's Reptile House, not far from where she disappeared, said James J. Breheny, the zoo's director.

(Animation: Click will bring up the lead of the story)

Turn to Example 13 and read it.

ASK: Is there anything missing from this story?

What habit might that gap reinforce?

(Follow the News, Check Multiple Outlets)

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/bronx-zoo-cobra-found-alive/>



Take a look at Example 14

And remember the concepts we covered in Lecture 7:
Fairness, Balance and Bias

The Governor suspends a public official and demands his resignation.

Governor says the official MISLED officials about his actual residence.

Governor says Manzo reported he lived in Paterson.

Governor says on "Real Housewives of New Jersey," Manzo is shown at a home in Franklin Lakes.

ASK:

Using the concepts from Lecture 7, should this story be balanced (equivalent weight and time given to each side) or Fair to the evidence (reflective of the accepted truth)?

What is missing from this story?

(Public records, independent sources, Transparency about the provenance of the Manzo quote.)

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/gov_rips_housewives_hubby_uwTjSjBpiA4JgkORE6RxJI



(Animation: Click brings up quotes from both sides.)

Let's look at Example #15

What can you conclude about what happened?

Is it King's fault?

Should he have been given a chance to speak?

Was she a victim of prejudice?

How might this change a decision or action in your own life?

<http://www.newsday.com/news/nation/muslim-removed-from-flight-blames-rep-king-s-hearings-1.2764991>

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Deconstructing the News

Case Study: The pregnant man story



Pregnant man is expecting baby in July
BY COMBINED NEWS SERVICES
11/07/2008

Thomas Beatie, who's expecting a girl, tells his story in a first-person account published in "The Advocate" magazine, that also includes a picture of him while he was 22 weeks pregnant.

pregnant.

Beatie, legally a male, lives with his wife, Nancy. He claims to have stopped taking his testosterone injections to get pregnant. "Sterilization is not a requirement for sex reassignment, so I decided to have chest reconstruction and testosterone therapy, but kept my reproductive rights," he wrote in the story for the gay and lesbian magazine.

"How does it feel to be a pregnant man? Incredible," he adds. "Despite the fact that my belly is growing with a new life inside me, I am stable and confident being the man that I am."

Assess reliability by Evaluating Sources & Evidence

Please turn to **Example 12: The Pregnant Man**.

The original story was in The Advocate, a magazine we might not have known much about.

ASK: What would it take for you to believe this story?

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Deconstructing the News

Case Study: The pregnant man story

March 26, 2008
Thomas Beatie, a married man who used to be a woman, is pregnant with a baby girl

"A transgender man can be pregnant because he has the same organs as a woman," Dr Masterson said on the ABC Good Morning America show.

How does it feel to be a pregnant man? Incredible," wrote Thomas Beatie, 34, from the

Some of the Beaties' neighbours in Bend voiced scepticism about the pregnancy claim. One resident, Josh Love, told ABC: "I couldn't say that he looks pregnant. I can stick my stomach out and almost make it look like that. I think it's kind of bizarre. I don't know if I believe it or not."

The Advocate said it had confirmed the story with Mr Beatie's doctor.

MORE US & AMERICAS NEWS
 AMERICA NEWS
 EUROPE NEWS
 MIDDLE EAST NEWS
 ASIA NEWS
 AFRICA NEWS

TIMES RECOMMENDS
 Iraqi police in Basra are switching sides
 Mugabe has robbed us of our dignity
 Ex-security guard solves maths riddle

ENDEAVOUR SPACEWALK

Do These Sources Help?

Look at this March 27th story: it has more detail.

Story says he is expecting baby in July. Several more sources are cited...Are they reliable?

ASK: Why or why not.

How would you check it further?

With medical records?

What evidence shows that this is or is not a hoax?

This report relies heavily on the Advocate's story. Is that a reliable source?

Deconstructing the News

Case Study: The pregnant man story



Does This Sonogram Help?

Now we've got a Sonogram.
Does the sonogram have weight?
What kind of evidence is it?

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Deconstructing the News

Case Study: The pregnant man story

'Pregnant man' Thomas Beatie gives birth to baby girl

James Bone in New York

The pregnant man who conceived a child after a gender-reassignment operation has apparently given birth to a healthy baby girl.

"She's really cute, really pretty," a source told ABC News.

Thomas Beatie, 34, told People magazine that he had given birth at a hospital in Bend, Oregon on Sunday. "The only thing different about me is that I can't breastfeed my baby. But a lot of mothers don't," he said, adding that he planned to publish a book about the experience this autumn.

The bearded Mr Beatie was born a girl and named Tracy.



Do Baby Photos Help?

How about the picture of him holding the baby?

What kind of evidence is that?

Is this an example of provisional truth?

What changed over time?


What kind of new evidence emerged?

(lecturer see BackgroundPak. Beatie has had three children now and 10 years of hormone treatment apparently did not prevent pregnancy. Beatie is a "top-only" transgendered person: Kept reproductive organs, but had breasts removed and took hormones for 10 years to get bear, male features, etc.)

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Deconstructing the News

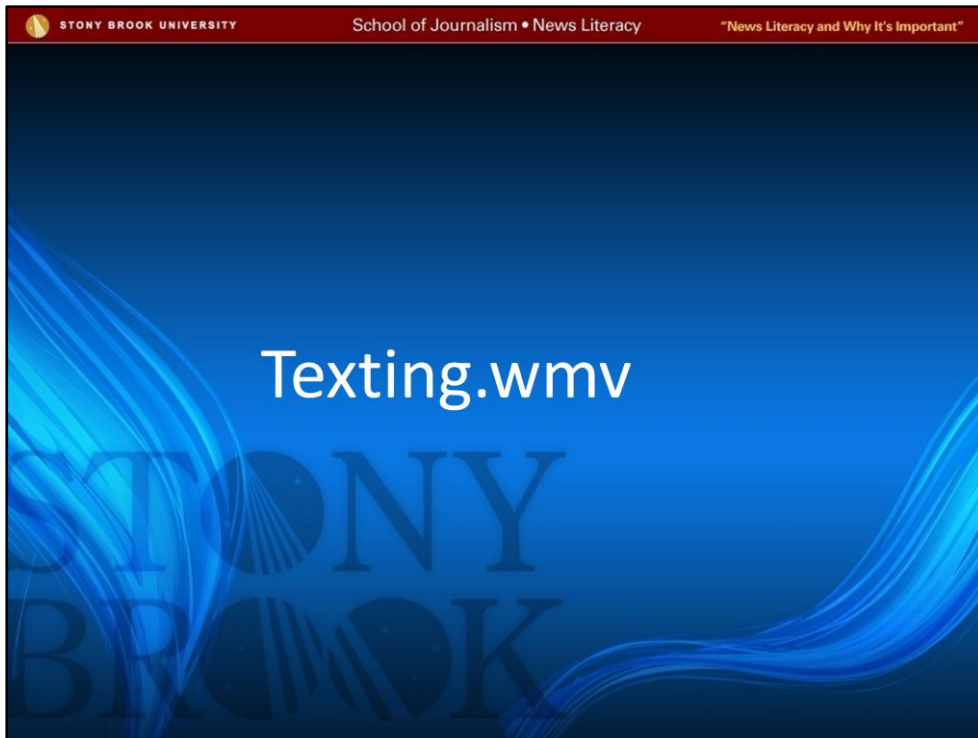
Too Much Texting a Mental Illness?
The need to always have phone in hand may signal a bigger problem.
03/27/2008



How reliable?

Now let's go back to the example we started with, the clip from ABC News saying that there is an epidemic of texting and it's an illness.

As you watch, keep a list of the evidence and of the sources.



NEWSFELLOW: NEWS FELLOW: LINK (INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT "START AUTOMATICALLY"

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Deconstructing the News

Too Much Texting a Mental Illness?
The need to always have phone in hand may signal a bigger problem.
03/27/2008

SYMPTOMS OF TEXTING ADDICTION

1. Excessive Use
2. Withdrawal
3. Tolerance
4. Negative Repercussion

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY abc NEWS.com

Weigh sources and evidence

(Animation: Slide opens with phone and mad texter. Each following clip brings up another source and then the final click is the study)

ASK: Evidence?

Sources?

(Three Vox Pop interviews.

Excerpts from a study.)

The apparent starting point is a study reported on in the American Journal of Psychiatry.

THAT would be an expert or informed source.

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A Deconstruction Worksheet

How to Judge Reliability

- 1) Summarize the main points: Does the headline and the lead support the main point(s)?
- 2) How close does the reporter come to opening the freezer? Is the evidence direct or indirect?

You can't do all eight steps of the deconstruction process on every story you read in your life.

But when the topic really matters to you and you're getting ready to make decision or take action...you better be sure you're working from reliable information.

Here's how:

1. Summarize the main points of the story.

Do the headline and lede support the main point(s) of the story?

2. Assess the evidence supporting the main points of the story. Is Direct? Indirect? How close did the reporter come to opening the freezer?

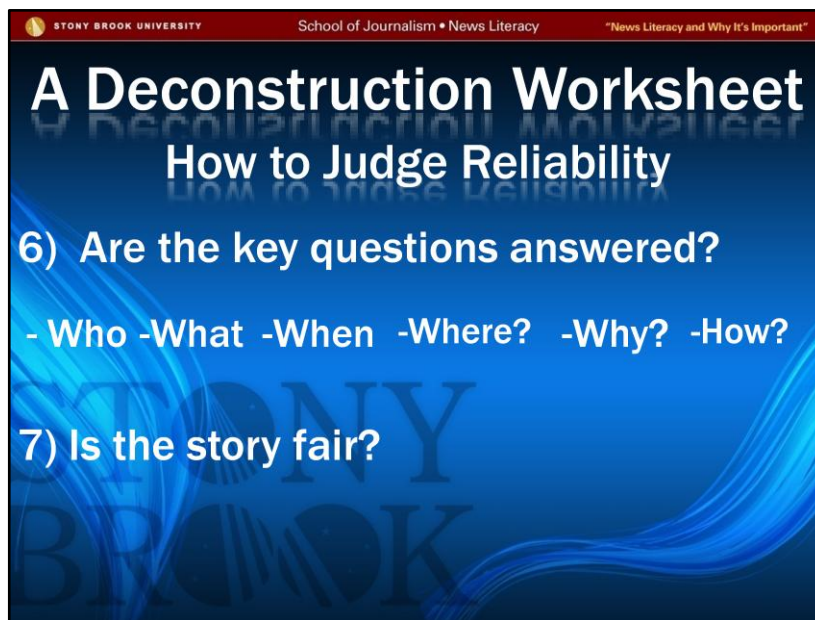
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A Deconstruction Worksheet

How to Judge Reliability

- 3) Evaluate the reliability of the sources using I'M VA/IN
- 4) Does the reporter make his/her work transparent?
- 5) Does the reporter place the story in context?

3. Are the sources reliable? (Are you reacting to them, or analyzing them?)
5. Does the reporter make his or her work transparent? How does the reporter know what is being reported?
6. Does the reporter place the story in context?



(ANIMATION: who, what, when where, why, who all fade in, in succession.)

Are the key questions answered? (And what is left out.)

Is the story balanced? Should it be? Is it fair to the evidence and to key stakeholders?

When the information matters because you're going to make a decision, take action or share it with others...these questions matter.

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And the Whole Point Is...

Is it actionable?

Can you reach a conclusion?

Can you take an action?

Can you make a judgment?

Can you share this information?

Again...WHAT'S THE POINT? THE SEARCH FOR RELIABLE INFORMATION

Oh...and a good grade on the final, which is all deconstruction.

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Assignments:

Print this and bring to lecture THIS WEEK:

Deconstruction Booklet
The Decon Booklet becomes a *key document* for the remainder of the semester. You will bring to all classes from now on.

Watch before recitation:
Stephen Glass interview on 60 Minutes

Prior to next week's lecture:
Upload Walter Reed Homework



Note, they are to bring the Deconstruction Guide to Recitation, as well.

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Deconstructing the News

Deconstruct the Following Story

College Costs Keep Rising, Report Says

By TAMAR LEWIN
Published: October 20, 2009

The price of a college education rose substantially last year, despite a 2.1 percent decline in the [Consumer Price Index](#) from July 2008 to July 2009.

Hit hard by state budget cuts, four-year public colleges raised tuition and fees by an average of 6.5 percent last year. Prices at private colleges rose 4.4 percent, according to a [report](#) issued Tuesday by the [College Board](#).

Patrick Callan, president of the [National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education](#), called the increases "hugely disappointing."

"Given the financial hardship of the country, it's simply astonishing that colleges and universities would have this kind of increases," Mr. Callan said. "It tells you that higher education is still a seller's market. The level of debt we're asking people to undertake is unsustainable."

Multimedia

2008-9	2009-10
\$2,372	\$2,544
\$6,591	\$7,020
\$17,460	\$18,548
\$26,423	\$28,112

High Tuition

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WATCH TRAILER

Use All Eight Workbook Questions

(A full-scale deconstruction, best for recitation)
 (After practicing just one element of the process on each of the preceding stories, you'll now go through the entire process on one story, using the Deconstruction Guide on the back page of the Deconstruction workbook)

Workbook Example #17: "College Costs Keep Rising"

What can you conclude?
 How might this change a decision or action in your own life?

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Deconstructing the News

Deconstruct the Following Story

For Youths, Depression Often Has a Sequel

By PAMBELLUCK *The New York Times*
Published: November 1, 2010

About half of adolescents who recovered from major depression became depressed again within five years, regardless of what treatment or therapy they received to get over their initial depression, a new study shows.

The study, published Monday in Archives of General Psychiatry, also found that girls were more likely to have another major depression, which surprised researchers because, as adults, women have not been considered more likely to have a recurrence than men.

Use All Eight Workbook Questions

(A full-scale deconstruction, best for recitation)
(After practicing just one element of the process on each of the preceding stories, you'll now go through the entire process on one story, using the Deconstruction Guide on the back page of the Deconstruction workbook)

Workbook Example #16: "For Youths, Depression Often Has a Sequel"

What can you conclude?

How might this change a decision or action in your own life?