

JRN 101B/ 103G: News Literacy/ FALL 2010

Recitation: How Do You Verify Information?

I. Organization

- A. Attendance
- B. News Quiz

II. QUICK RECAP the “Balance, Fairness and Bias” Lecture

- What do we mean by balance in journalism? Give examples.
- What do we mean by fairness? Where does judgment come in?
- What do we mean by bias?
- Hammer the Cognitive Dissonance concepts: attribution error, confirmation bias, hostile media effect, Red Media/Blue Media study

III. Sean Bell exercise (On the board)

- A. One technique for helping news consumers distinguish what they can reasonably conclude after reading a news story is the following: draw a line down the center of a blank piece of paper; on one side list every piece of information in the story that they believe is *verified*; on the other side, list everything they believe is *asserted*. (There are many assertions. When they’re done, ask: What do they know, How do they know it? What don’t they know?

IV. The Secret Sponsors (On the board, tallying)

- A. Go through the story, on the board, and see what students come up with for verification steps. (Can have them write it). This should be a quick review of the homework and a chance to catch any misperceptions and clear them up.

V. Verifying Information, a group exercise

Divide the class into three or four groups. Tell them their group has a set amount of time (use what’s left) to figure out how to verify two pieces of information. (You can think up your own, but here are some for simplicity. Point is, you want a little competition among the groups.

When time runs out, have them report and discuss each other’s steps and reflect on the difficulty of verifying, under time pressure. Did they make conscious choices to seek direct evidence, mitigate indirect, etc...

Examples:

The security door in my dorm has been broken for a week, even though several students have reported it.

Seven people got food poisoning at the dining hall by eating turkey burgers.

Four cars were broken into last night in the lot by my dorm/apartment.

My boss was once Chechnya’s ambassador to the Court of St. James.