

# WRITING ASSIGNMENTS FOR UNIT 2

## NEWS LITERACY

*Judging the Credibility and Reliability of News Stories*



“News Literacy is the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports, whether they come via print, television or the Internet.”

~Howard Schneider

### Assignments

- 1 Thesis-Support Essay
- 4 Short Writings (hereafter referred to as SWs)
- Oral Presentations

### Thesis-Support Essay Assignment

#### Purpose

- For you to practice critical thinking about public sphere events reported by news media
- For you to demonstrate that you understand ethical and quality standards for reliable journalism
- For you to demonstrate that you can organize, develop, & sustain an evaluation (matching criteria for reliable journalism against a sample of news and opinion texts)

#### Writer’s Task

Prepare an **evaluative case study** of a news story’s evolution **over time and around the globe**. You may **either** track one story as it was reported around the globe within the same 24-hour period, or you may track the way the story evolved over the course of approximately a week—e.g., Sunday to Sunday.

Use online news resources to track and evaluate how a fairly current story has been reported by **five different media outlets—two of the media outlets must be from outside the United States**. Your thesis should assert a claim about the quality and consistency or inconsistency of the coverage. As described in ABGW’s evaluation argument assignment (p. 436), “the body of your argument should establish criteria for evaluating your chosen subject, and then show how your subject meets or does not meet the criteria.” For criteria for this paper, draw from our assigned readings and various handouts from class about news and media literacy and good journalistic practice. (Additional readings are available on Ares and on Web sites listed on D2L.) Write your evaluation from the standpoint of an ordinary, open-minded citizen trying to understand fully the particular set of news stories you’ve chosen for your case study.

Guidelines for choosing the five texts that you’ll evaluate:

1. Pay attention to current news broadcasts, newspapers, and news sites to decide what event you want to track for the assigned case study.
2. Story must be current since Jan. 1, 2009.

### Unit 2 Grade

#### 25% of final course grade

The unit grade will be awarded to the final essay; however, SWs must be completed on due dates AND turned in with Portfolio Two in order for you to receive full credit for the unit. Exceptionally good performance on the activities leading up to the final paper will boost your unit grade; poor performance may lower it. (See the syllabus for other grading policies.)

**Due Date for Peer Review: Tues., Feb. 24**

**Due Date for Submission to Instructor: Tues., Mar. 3 (plus 5 Oral Briefings)**

3. Your five texts should evolve from a **hard news story** that reported on an event or an announcement (e.g., a court decision, medical research, an investigative report). **No entertainment or sports stories.**
4. The texts must all be in English and readily accessible via either the Internet (you provide links in your references list) or a library database.
5. To find English language newspapers from around the globe, go to *Arts and Letters Daily* ([www.aldaily.com](http://www.aldaily.com)) and click on Newspapers at the upper left, or go to Today's Front Pages at the Newseum ([www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/flash/](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/flash/)).
6. **One** of the five texts you evaluate **may** be a television news broadcast.
7. **One** of the five texts you evaluate **may** be a radio news broadcast.
8. **Note:** If you work with a broadcast of either type, you must make a textual transcript available, through a link or database. To find transcripts, search the media outlet's Web site or search Lexis-Nexis (click on "transcripts" in the drop-down menu for sources)
9. **One** of the five texts you examine **may** be an **opinion piece/commentary**. Focus your analysis primarily on how the opinion piece presents facts within the context of expressing an opinion or making an argument. Choose **one** from among the following:
  - a. Newspaper editorial (typically unsigned) or op-ed column (typically signed)
  - b. A commentary from a media writer/columnist (e.g., a segment from NPR's *On the Media* or a piece by a writer listed on [www.journalism.org/dailybriefings](http://www.journalism.org/dailybriefings) (See the right edge of the home page.)
  - c. A political opinion column selected from those posted at TownHall.com or at HuffingtonPost.com (Again: Focus primarily on **how** the facts are presented within the context of the opinion expressed.)

Length = 6–8 pages, plus APA references list



### The Road to Success Short Writes and Oral Presentations

Remember: **two** of the texts you work with must have originated (via broadcast or publication on paper or on the Web by an organization **outside the United States**.)

1. The various short writes will serve as milestones on the road to success. As you work on them, think about how BOTH the critical thinking processes and the content might pertain to your unit paper. These sequenced writings are intended to help you think about your essay topic so that you can revise your ideas as we proceed through the unit. If appropriate for your paper, your **SWs may be incorporated into your final essay.**
2. You will receive credit for doing the SWs and informal OPs if you complete them by the assigned dates, bring them to class for discussion, and turn them in for my feedback.
3. Use APA parenthetical citations and a references list for all external sources you use in your paper **AND** in your SWs. I will provide models for citing news stories and broadcasts.
4. Grading criteria for the unit paper are listed on the last sheet of this packet and will be discussed in detail in class. A full scoring rubric is posted on D2L.
5. Follow carefully the format guidelines for "Submitting Your Papers" on page 4 of the syllabus.
6. The same page explains what to include in the double-pocket portfolio you turn in on March 3.



## Specific SW and OP Assignments for Unit 2

SW #1: Journalism or Satire? Create a bulleted list of the criteria being applied by the Project for Excellence in Journalism article on Ares entitled “Journalism, Satire, or Just Laughs?” Then apply those criteria to evaluate two recent (since Jan. 1) segments of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (1 ¶ each—submit one bulleted list + two paragraphs w/ APA reference containing URL for the video ) **Due Tues., Feb. 10.**

Model reference for TV show segment:

Stewart, J. (2008, Jan. 19). Obama inauguration. In *The Daily Show*. [Television program].

Retrieved from <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=215939&title=obama-inauguration>

Break URLs only at slash marks.

SW #2: Watch a 30-minute local TV news program and list the sequence of stories AND products advertised, then reflect on what that sequence reveals about the news outlet’s assumptions about audience values. What does the line-up of stories tell you about what the station thinks viewers will be interested in?

Suggestion: Divide up stations, times, and days among your inquiry group members. Groups with people who did not present ads will report findings to the class. Submit list with one ¶ of reflection about apparent news/audience values. **Due Thurs., Feb. 12**

SW #3: Choose one story from your case study and run it through the questions on the Deconstruction Guide handout. Submit list of Q & A plus one paragraph summary highlighting the most important points. Provide paper copy of story or APA reference with URL so that I can glance over the story. **Due Tues., Feb. 17, aka Lock In Day**

SW #4 Type up a paragraph-by-paragraph **does-says** analysis of the latest draft of your unit paper (use the peer review draft or a subsequent revision). See model list of statements on ABGW 132. Bring this plus the draft to class on **Thurs., Feb. 26**, for a style and organization workshop.



### Oral Briefing about Your Paper to the Entire Class

5 people for this unit; the rest of you will speak in other units

1. **Purpose:** To help you become comfortable speaking in front of a group  
To give you practice giving brief oral summaries
2. **Format:** Speak for 10 minutes. You may use notes/outline ,but do not simply read your paper.  
Hint: 5-min speech equals about 2 double-spaced pages
3. **Content:** Brief the class on your case study for Unit 2
4. **Organization:** In a brief summary (1) set up the news event and context, (2) state your thesis, (3) forecast the structure of your talk, (4) give main points/reasons that support your thesis—hint: Use details sparingly in an oral briefing
5. **Style:** Academic, for an audience with shared interest and background in the area or subject matter (i.e., evaluation of news stories presented by different news outlets)
6. **Visual aids:** What visuals will help your audience (a) follow your points (Maps? News logos? Headlines? Key photographs?)

## Unit Two Essay Grading Criteria

These questions are derived from the scoring rubric on D2L and are listed on the grade sheet that I will use to grade your paper.

- **Purpose/Audience Negotiation**
  1. How well does the opening of the paper locate its purpose in terms of evaluating coverage of an event by multiple U.S. and international news media?
  2. How well does the paper develop an argument by applying clearly articulated evaluative criteria *re* good quality journalism?
  3. How efficiently does the paper provide needed contextual information *re* the event and news sources under discussion?
  4. How well does the paper address the class and teacher as an audience w/in a common conversation about reliable journalism?
- **Organization**
  5. How well does the thesis statement make an evaluative claim about the quality of coverage across the media outlets and indicate the criteria used for evaluation?
  6. Does the text employ a logical sequence of paragraphs?
  7. Does the text organize ideas logically within paragraphs?
  8. Is there an effective conclusion, avoiding mere summary?
- **Development**
  9. How well is the thesis supported by body paragraphs that explain the criteria-match process in use? (ABGW 439)
  10. How well are body paragraphs developed from point sentences stating the writer's reasoning in the writer's own words?
  11. How well does the text provide evidence for these criteria-match points via summary, paraphrase, and quotation?
  12. How effectively does the text summarize and respond to anticipated objections to criteria or to matches?
- **Student Expert's *ethos***
  13. How well does the writer demonstrate confident, authoritative understanding of the assigned evaluative purpose & content?
  14. How well does the writer demonstrate personal engagement with purpose and content?
- **Readability**
  15. How free is the text of spelling, grammar, punctuation errors?
  16. How effectively do sentences use clear subjects and verbs, parallelism, and transitions?
  17. Is there evidence that the writer attended to the old-new contract to enhance readability?
  18. How well chosen is the text's vocabulary?
- **Information Literacy**
  19. How well chosen are the news sources that are evaluated?
  20. Is access provided to all five news sources?
  21. How effectively does the text rhetorically analyze sources?
  22. How well does the text use attributive phrases and internal APA style parenthetical citations?
  23. Does the text present an accurate APA references list?