

## After this lecture, students will be able to:

1. Define provisional truth and explain the burden on the news consumer that results from truth's provisional nature.
2. Explain the process by which journalists verify facts and compare/contrast it with other truth-seeking enterprises such as science and justice.
3. Explain how the journalistic verification process breaks down.
4. Use specific events and examples to illustrate the types of evidence news consumers should insist upon, summarized in this phrase "Open the Freezer"

These skills relate to course outcomes 1 & 4

This slide intended for instructors as a focusing tool, but can be shared with students to prime them. Each lecture will include a slide like this with specific lecture outcomes that refer to course outcomes.

Here is what the syllabus declares students will be able to do if they successfully complete the course:

1. Analyze key elements of news reports – weighing evidence, evaluating sources, noting context and transparency – to judge reliability.
2. Distinguish between journalism, opinion journalism and un-supported bloviation.
3. Identify and distinguish between news media bias and audience bias.
4. Blend personal scholarship and course materials to write forcefully about journalism standards and practices, fairness and bias, First Amendment issues and their individual Fourth Estate rights and responsibilities.
5. Use examples from each day's news to demonstrate critical thinking about civic engagement.
6. Place the impact of social media and digital technologies in their historical context.

## What is True and How Do You Know?



Did he get all the way up with no rope?

This guy claims he scaled a sheer rock face taller than the Empire State Building, with no safety rope.

Do you believe it?

Would you share it with your little brother before he goes to the rock climbing gym?

Every moment, we're bombarded with images and video and claims that may or may not be true.

How do we know what's true and what is not?

Can we make decisions or take actions based on it?

That's the heart of this course and today we start the process of deconstructing the

news to decide for ourselves what is true.



In the aftermath of the Boston Marathon Bombing in April 2013, Reddit users went on a manhunt, scouring photos from the scene to identify the perpetrators.

Run by someone with the user-name "Oops777" (seriously! Look it up!) a sub-reddit called "findbostonbombers" set out to harness the power of crowd-sourcing to do what the police couldn't seem to do: find the bombers.

Using police descriptions of the people being sought, Reddit users settled on pictures of a young runner, then used Facebook and other facial recognition technologies to identify the suspect: Salah Barhoun.

On April 18 (2013), three days after the bombing, The New York Post, following Reddit, slapped Salhoun's picture on the cover, declaring him a suspect.

But when the surviving suspect was caught the next day, not only was Barhoun not the bomber. He had never been a suspect.

# Truth and Consequences

**Newsweek**

## **How a Fire Broke Out**

The story of a sensitive NEWSWEEK report about alleged abuses at Guantánamo Bay and a surge of deadly unrest in the Islamic world.

**By Evan Thomas**

NEWSWEEK

May 23 issue - By the end of the week, the rioting had spread from Afghanistan throughout much of the Muslim world, from Gaza to Indonesia. Mobs shouting "Protect our Holy Book!" burned down government buildings and ransacked the offices of relief organizations in several Afghan provinces. The violence cost at least 15 lives, injured scores of people and sent a shudder through Washington, where officials worried about the stability of moderate regimes in the region.

April 30, 2005 Newsweek Magazine reported that guards at Guantanamo Bay had desecrated some prisoners' Korans. Riots broke out in the Muslim World. But the story was mostly wrong and Newsweek's correction came too late for the 15 people killed in the riots.



Journalism's First Obligation is to the Truth.

That's pretty simple.

Find the truth, share it.

What's so hard about that?

Well, pretty much the whole history of thinking and writing can be boiled down to this question:

How do we know what is true?

### Three Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does verification sometimes fail?*

We are returning to the very first question we asked in this course: Do you believe you are getting the truth from the news media?

People spend lifetimes answering the first of today's questions. So, we concede we are glossing over centuries of scholarship...

## What Is “Journalistic Truth?”



ASK: So what do YOU mean when you say “Truth”...And how might that differ from “Journalistic Truth?”



## What Is Truth?



*"A lie gets halfway  
around the world before  
the truth has a chance  
to put its pants on."  
-Winston Churchill*

Given what we now know about the way technologies like the press, the telegram, TV and the Internet have accelerated the spread of news and information...what did Churchill mean?

(LECTURERS: Neat to know, but not Need to know: Though Churchill is usually credited with saying this, we've been unable to definitively source it to him. First attribution was about 1855, the sermon of an obscure English Baptist.)

# What Is Truth?



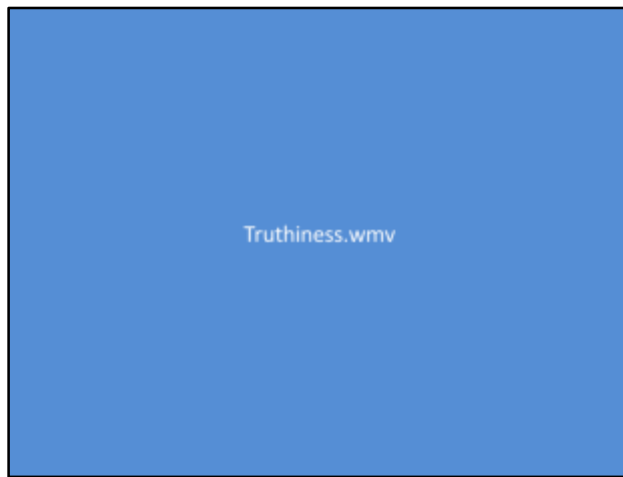
**“Truthiness”\***

**-Stephen Colbert**

**\*“The quality of stating concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true.”**

**-The American Dialect Society**

On the October 17, 2005 pilot episode of The Colbert Report, he coined the word that would become Merriam Webster’s 2006 Word of the year: “Truthiness. “



NEWS FELLOW: LINK (INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT “START AUTOMATICALLY” and “Play Full Screen”

*“Truth that comes from the gut, not from books.”* Colbert used it to skewer Wikipedia, the 2003 decision to invade Iraq and President Bush’s defense of his nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court. The American Dialect Society says in conversational use, “Truthiness” is the quality of stating concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true.”

“The Truth” is what *really* happened, or the way the world *really* is.



The process of JUSTIFYING a truth claim with EVIDENCE is

**VERIFICATION**

If we could achieve certainty, then truth wouldn't be provisional. But the possibility of error means no absolute certainty.

If we can't be certain, what do we want?

Reasonable Confidence

What increases Reasonable Confidence?

Seeking Evidence that Verifies or Falsifies a Claim. Think of science class. You propose an explanation, test it, move on. In science there is always a “margin of error.” By constricting variables, repeating the test, using more test subjects, that margin of error can be lowered, but never eliminated.

In Journalism, we call this collection of evidence the Verification Process.

(Note that this slide is addressing statements about the world that are based on the five senses and cultural conventions. If someone wants to discuss whether there is a class of “things” that we can know with certainty, they should take a philosophy class.

The extreme response to “There is No Certainty” is a certain and debilitating skepticism. But there are alternatives to the standard of certainty...our alternative is reasonable confidence.)

## Partial Evidence, Different "Truths"



When can we be satisfied that we have enough evidence?

Here's how Philosophers take the idea of truth out for a walk in the real world.

Given time, and diligence, people searching for the truth about this lectern would converge on certain common sets of facts: height, weight, material, shape.

It's the idea behind Moynihan's Maxim, right?

We can have an intelligent conversation about this lectern only if we can at least agree on certain facts: it is 47 inches tall and weighs 300 pounds. I can reliably plan on lecturing from behind it because it is not taller than I am. And that will be true every time I stand behind it...

But that's the ideal case. What about the classic tale of the blind men and the elephant? They compare what they feel and cannot agree what it is.

It is notable that the moral of this story is not relativism about the truth, since despite the plurality of perspectives and theories of what an elephant is, **there is a real elephant, and that elephant is a certain way independent of the blind men's theories.** The trick for a scientific community of investigators is to develop a theory that can account for all of the relevant perspectives, and unify them into a single account of what an elephant is, justifiable by evidence.

## What Do Journalists Mean By Truth?



### 1. Seek Truth and Report It (i.e. NOW)\*

*"...Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible...."*

## What do JOURNALISTS MEAN BY TRUTH?

Among other things, The Professional Journalist tests the accuracy of information, proceeds cautiously and does not distort...all on deadline.

The best collect as much relevant evidence as possible. But "As Possible is a big qualifier. In other words, do what you can by deadline. Because Journalism is truth-gathering with a short time limit, journalists and news consumers should always be asking – is there more relevant evidence that can be practically collected?

Is getting the facts right the same as the truth?


Is being 'objective' the same as being truthful?

How about fairness?

Can we even agree on a common truth?

Was the President of the United States born in the United States of America or not?

**Scientific Truth**  
A.K.A **Theory**



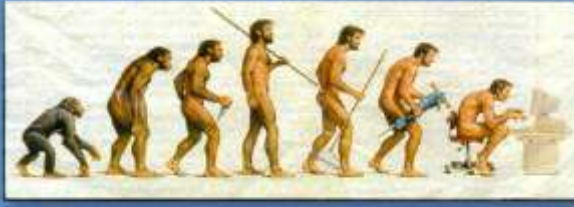
*Scientific truth is a statement of probability proportional to the evidence. It will change over time as the evidence changes.*

The Dean of Journalism and a Stony Brook philosopher and a scientist met to discuss truth.

To the surprise of the scientist in the debate—and probably to many of the science majors in attendance— what emerged were strong similarities between way truth is defined by scientists and journalists.

Here's the phrase you need to hang onto: **Scientific truth is a statement of probability proportional to the evidence.** It will change over time as the evidence changes.

## Journalism and Science Share A Pragmatic Definition



Like scientists, journalists do not believe in absolute truth. Evidence, and therefore belief, makes what we call "truth" provisional.

What we casually refer to as TRUTH is that collection of evidence that is the justification for our belief that the earth is flat.

That belief the earth is flat changes over time as new evidence is discovered.

This is one of the key lessons of the lecture...the course...your college education: you've got to be open to new ideas because the evidence that justifies our beliefs about truth accumulates over time , which requires us to change our beliefs.

If we keep up, our belief about the truth of the shape of the planet earth will become more reliable, or truer.



## Journalism and Science



Another parallel:  
Expert Peer Reviewers vs. Editors and Competitors

Both disciplines employ a system of peer review.

In journalism, there is “peer review” *before* in the form of editing *and after* publication or broadcast in the form of competitors and commentators.

It’s not nice, but a reporter’s finest day is figuring out, the day after getting scooped, that the story they were scooped on was wrong.

That competitive culture is what sanitizes mistakes. Mess up and your competitors will be sure to highlight it.

Examples: Rothergate, NYT reporting on Saddam

Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction.

## Journalism and Science



Another parallel: the journalistic process of verification resembles the scientific method

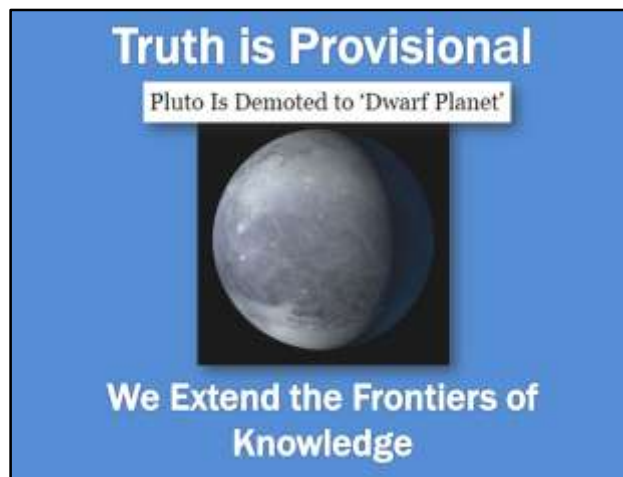
(EMPHASIZE PARALLELS)

### Scientists:

- Propose hypotheses to explain why or how things happen in the world (phenomena);
- Design controlled experiments to test hypotheses;
- Repeat experiment to test reliability of its findings;
- Document findings;
- Share them for careful scrutiny (peer review) by other scientists.

### Journalists:

- Collect, sort and analyze observations as well.
- Occasionally venture a hypothesis or explanation;
- Cannot control variables, run parallel experiments;
- Document and share immediately
- Submit to careful scrutiny by other journalists and news literate news consumers, (peer review)
- Disclosure of data/methods is “transparency.”



Based on observation of orbits of other objects, astronomers long theorized a ninth planet and in 1930, an Arizona observatory confirmed it with photos. But then in 2006, newer and more sophisticated images showed it is just another object in the Kuiper belt...a mere dwarf planet. Around the same time, the IAU realized it had no precise meaning of the term planet. So they voted Pluto out.

*WHAT? You can't just change facts like that, can you? If they don't know for sure, why didn't they wait until they knew for sure, ...those astronomers?*

*ASK: So how long should the International Astronomical Union have waited to tell people about Pluto's discovery...76 years?*

*ASK: Why should we publish or teach changeable truths?*



(repeats prior slide. Cuttable alternative) The moon is quite a bit younger than scientists had previously believed, new research suggests.

The leading theory of [how the moon formed](#) holds that it was created when a mysterious planet — one the size of Mars or larger — slammed into Earth about 4.56 billion years ago, just after the solar system came together. But new analyses of lunar rocks suggest that the moon, which likely [coalesced from the debris blasted into space](#) by this monster impact, is actually between 4.4 billion and 4.45 billion years old. The finding, which would make the moon 100 million years younger than previously thought, could reshape scientists' understanding of the early Earth as well as its natural satellite, researchers said.

## Journalistic Truth is *Provisional*

pro·vi·sion·al

/preˈviʒHənəl/ ⓘ

Adjective

Arranged or existing for the present, possibly to be changed later.

Noun

A provisional postage stamp.

Synonyms

temporary - interim - provisory - tentative - temporal

Today's evidence will be trumped  
by tomorrow's discoveries

For the purposes of this course, we expect you to understand that Journalistic truth is provisional, which means it may change. Rational beliefs may be logical conclusions from the evidence available, but at least they are justifiable if based on the best available evidence.

In other words, the freshest

In other words, what journalists believe is that what we call “truth” is actually provisional. It will change as new evidence comes to light. We can never be completely satisfied with today’s “version of the Truth.”

We must always be on the lookout for better evidence.



September 2009, a Hofstra student reports she was raped in a dorm bathroom by a man who stole her cellphone.

Four men are arrested, named, mugshots published.

Within days the story turns upside down as new information is disclosed.

(After recapping the case)

ASK:

- What was the rush?
- Why not wait until the facts were settled?
- If you have a daughter at Hofstra, how long are you willing to wait to learn about this?
- Was the first story untrue? Or was it merely the first chapter in an unfolding story?

What Is Journalistic Truth:  
The Best Obtainable Version On That Day



truth

A Continuous Journey Toward Understanding  
That Places A Burden On You...

## **ANIMATION: CLICK BRINGS UP “TRUTH” FADING FROM FUZZY TO SHARPER.**

We can be reasonably confident in the truthfulness of a report that unfolds over the course of many days.

Think of it as the process of a picture slowly coming into focus by photographers whose aim is to collect as accurate a representation as possible of what is in front of that lens...and the difference between a wide-angle lens and a super-close-up lens can change the type of “truth” in that representation.

This can be frustrating for a culture that wants to know everything right now. We are likely to see some sharp reversals of journalistic truth as new information comes to light. This is why smart news consumers look for reporters who never quit

digging.

IT IS NOT CAPITAL T TRUTH – THAT IS,  
SOME COSMOLOGICAL OR ETERNAL  
CONSTANT. It is small t truth. A pragmatic,  
reality-based concept that changes over  
time

And it's why news consumers, i.e. YOU,  
must.....



# Follow the Story Over Time

The Burden is on You

**ANIMATION: THREE CLICKS. EACH OF WHICH CALLS ATTENTION TO “FOLLOW THE STORY”**  
*For news consumers, the LESSON is: FOLLOW THE STORY OVER TIME!!!!*

Our knowledge, those verified beliefs in which we are reasonable confident, depends on what information is available...and that changes over time.

We must be vigilant, and tireless in the pursuit of better and more complete information, always ready to revise our beliefs and update them according to the latest evidence.

And that means looking for journalists who are tireless and open to reversing their account, if the latest evidence demands it.

**(With each click, repeat the phrase)**

## Three Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does verification sometimes fail?*

How does Verification work?

## The Discipline of Verification

- ✓ Gather, Assess, and Weigh Evidence
- ✓ Place Facts in The Big Picture (Context)
- ✓ Be Fair and When Appropriate, Adjust Balance
- ✓ Explain How They Know...(and What They Don't Know)\*

\*This is called "Transparency."

Verification is a process that takes *newsworthy information* (*think drivers*) and checks its credibility and reliability before it is published or broadcast as *news*.

A key to becoming a smarter news consumer is to understand the process of verification of each day's facts and decide for yourself if a story is solid or not.

Just because some Producer or Editor decides to run a story doesn't mean you should blindly accept their judgment.

\*Journalists gather, assess, and weigh information

\*Journalists place new facts in the big picture to give you context by which to form an accurate impression of what has happened.

\*Journalists seek enough information to make a story balanced or fair, as appropriate.

\*Journalists explain how they know what they know – and what they don't know: transparency.

Explain that we will return to the concepts of context and transparency in much greater detail in later lectures and that both are terms that bedevil many news literacy students.



In your search for reliable information about the world beyond your personal experience, it is helpful to think about how journalists verify truth. So far today, we've been talking about evidence. What's that mean?

At one end of a spectrum is Direct Evidence, which we tend to give more weight. At the other end is Indirect evidence.

What do we mean by Indirect and Direct?

Sometimes, the evidence is as clear cut as fingerprints that confirm someone has been someplace they did not belong.

And sometimes, the evidence is a combination of direct physical evidence and arm's length or even virtual evidence.

Used to support an inference, arm's length evidence stands up in a logical world...but many events and people aren't logical, which is why we say arm's length or indirect evidence is less reliable than direct evidence.

As a news consumer, you need to pay attention to which is which when you are deciding for yourself if a story stands up.

PIVOT POINT:



THINK ABOUT A TRAFFIC ACCIDENT...

DISCUSS (AND LIST) WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST RELIABLE EVIDENCE.

WHAT WOULD BE THE LEAST RELIABLE? (LIST THAT, TOO)

## Seeking Truth

### Natural Hierarchy of Direct Evidence

- Video, Photographs, Recordings
- Documents, Records, the Paper Trail
- Journalist Eyewitness Account
- Observer Eyewitness Account

On their own, videos and photographs are stronger evidence than documentary evidence. The eyewitness account from a journalist is stronger than the eyewitness account from a citizen. Look to see if a story has direct evidence. See where that evidence stands in the hierarchy. Put conflicting evidence side by side to see which is stronger. But also always ask...what is this particular piece of evidence actually evidence of? Video is the strongest form of evidence, but if the video does not show something incriminating, you do not have evidence of incrimination.

**Key questions: Is there any direct evidence? How naturally strong is that direct evidence? What is that piece of evidence actually evidence of?**

What about Arm's Length Evidence? The farther away from whatever is at issue, the less strength that evidence has. For example a Second Hand account is stronger than a Third Hand account.

Note: It says natural hierarchy, because this is when considering a piece of evidence by itself and ignoring the source or what other evidence might point to.



Enough theory...

This guy claims he scaled a sheer rock face taller than the Empire State Building, with no safety rope.



Climber.wmv

NEWS FELLOW: LINK (INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT “START AUTOMATICALLY” and “Play Full Screen”

Alex Honnold is a 26-year-old rock climber from Sacramento, California, who scales walls higher than the Empire State building, and he does it without any ropes or protection.

What you're about to see is someone holding onto a wall, thousands of feet above the ground, with nothing to stop him if he falls.

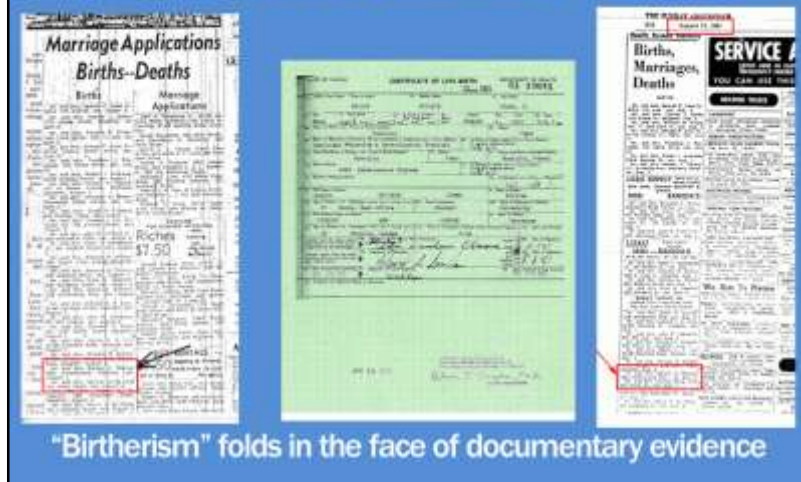
This is what climbers call free-soloing, and it's so dangerous, that less than 1 percent of people who climb attempt it.

You might not believe it's true if you didn't have reliable video of it.

The value of video as direct evidence is fairly obvious here.



## Journalistic Verification in Pursuit of The Truth Direct Evidence: Documents/Records:



Animation: Obama birth cert fades in with slide. On first click, a newspaper clipping fades in. On second click, second paper clipping fades in.

Political opponents of Barack Obama have for years encouraged the public to think he was born in Kenya and is therefore an illegitimate President. Finally, the Obama campaign released his official birth certificate, vouched for by state officials in Hawaii.

Reporters dug up the birth announcements from the newspapers at that time: an official document, corroborated by independent indirect evidence. Documents like this are powerful justification for the belief that President Obama was indeed born in Hawaii.

## Journalistic Verification in Pursuit of The Truth Eyewitness Accounts:

The Washington Times

### 'Lucky he was a bad shot': Eyewitness's haunting encounter with Navy Yard gunman

By Meredith Somers - The Washington Times

Monday, September 16, 2013

Terrie Durham and Todd Brundidge, both executive assistants in Building 197, said they started shuffling people out of the exit on their floor after a fire alarm sounded. As they were standing in the hallway, a gunman appeared and started firing.

"I could see his face," Ms. Durham said. "He looked around and fired. We were lucky he was a bad shot."

Here's a Washington Times report about the September, 2013 shooting at the Navy Yard in Washington, DC it's based almost entirely on eyewitness accounts, with some context and background thrown in.

Monday's mass shooting at the Navy Yard by former Navy reservist Aaron Alexis seared terrifying images of chaos and confusion into the minds of employees of Building 197 who were just starting their day.

Terrie Durham and Todd Brundidge, both executive assistants in Building 197, said they started shuffling people out of the exit on their floor after a fire alarm sounded. As they were standing in the hallway, a gunman appeared and started firing.

PHOTOS: Chaos amid shooting rampage at Washington Navy Yard  
"I could see his face," Ms. Durham said. "He looked around and fired. We were lucky he was a bad shot."

Mr. Brundidge said the distance in the hallway between the shooter and himself was about 30 yards. He could see the shooter was a man dressed in what appeared to be blue clothing. He said he could not tell whether it was an official uniform or other military garb.

Asked whether the gunman said anything, Ms. Durham said "not a word. He raised the gun and started firing."

Read more: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/16/lucky-he-was-bad-shot-eyewitness-haunting-encounter/#ixzz2i75wbli>



When reporters rush to the scene of a news event like Assad Regime's shelling of its own people in Syria, they'll often stop witnesses and bystanders to ask what happened, what they saw, how people acted. Although details like the time or exact sequence of events must be verified by further reporting, eyewitnesses bring important color to a report, helping news consumers understand it through the eyes of someone who experienced it.

CBS News' Clarissa Ward snuck into Syria to film the government's attack on rebel strongholds. Her personal observation, plus the video, is the classic example of how a journalist gets at the truth of what was happening in Syria when President Bashar al Assad began bombarding residential areas to punish his political opponents.



NEWS FELLOW: LINK (INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT “START AUTOMATICALLY” and “Play Full Screen”

## Seeking Truth

### Indirect Evidence:

- ✓ Accounts from Official spokespersons (I.e. Lawyer, Public Relations, Press Secretary, Press Releases)
- ✓ Expert reconstructions
- ✓ Hearsay Testimony (Second-Hand or more)
- ✓ Computer models
- ✓ Other predictions

Stress that there is a difference between the evidence and the source. In the case of second-hand testimony, it is the account, literally the statement about what has happened, that is evidence and the person that is the source.



Sometimes there is no witness, or they are not available, or there is no dna or photo. No direct evidence.

In those cases, journalists have to rely on second-hand or indirect evidence:

An appointed spokesperson (official or informal)

The police spokesperson who has been briefed by the investigators

The qualified expert who has practice recreating events from physical or other evidence. That person can confirm the probability of various scenarios consistent with other evidence. Or they can use evidence to provide a virtual picture of what happened.



Here's an example, where the story is based on interviews with a police spokesperson who was not a witness to events, but has more access than anyone else to official documents and investigators.

Is this arm's length evidence more or less credible?

On rare occasions, the information from a spokesperson like that is wrong.

When Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot in Arizona in January of 2011, New York Times.com and NPR were among those who reported she was dead.

It turns out, they heard it through the Sheriff's office and it was confirmed by her spokesperson.

An arm's-length source is only as good as the inside information they have been given.

## Journalistic Verification in Pursuit of The Truth

### Indirect Evidence from Witnesses:



"I saw him run in the house.  
Then I heard a woman scream.  
So, I guess he killed her."

In a criminal trial, the jury is often given a great deal of circumstantial evidence and then asked if that and a little direct evidence is enough for a guilty verdict. In a murder case, the jury has to be ready to set aside the presumption of innocence and declare guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

In journalism, reporters are often unable to gather all the direct evidence you would want. In that case, you need to pay attention to the type of evidence that is used to support the story. You're not on a jury, but you might ask yourself if you'd want your reputation changed on the basis of indirect evidence like this.



## How Journalists Pursue the Truth Indirect Evidence:

### Sugary drinks tied to obesity among preschoolers

Mon, Aug 5 2013

By Geneva Pittman

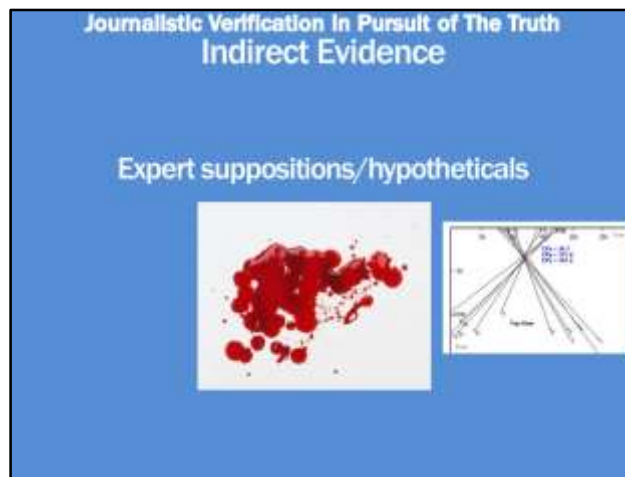
NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Five-year-olds who drink sugar-sweetened sodas, sports drinks or juices every day are more likely to be obese than those who have sugar-sweetened beverages less often, according to a new study.

Although the link between sugary drinks and extra weight has been well documented among teens and adults, researchers said that up until now, the evidence was less clear for young children.



Sometimes all we have is indirect evidence. People who drink big sugary sodas are more likely to be obese. We know that from multiple studies..

But do sugary drinks cause obesity? We don't yet know. There's a correlation. But so far, there is no cause-and-effect study that says sugary drinks cause obesity. Competing theories include genetic differences, behavioral differences, environmental differences and so on. Indirect evidence requires you to make inferences and the nature of inference is that there are several possible inferences that can be drawn. In this case, do the drinks make kids fat, or are obese kids heavy for other reasons that also make them want sugary drinks?



Forensic science uses substitutes to reconstruct injuries or events.

Using a case study, an experimental simulation of a finger can be made with a combination of hard wood and glycerin soap. With this model as an intermediate target simulation, it is possible not only to demonstrate the "bullet-body (finger) interaction", but also to recreate the wound pattern found in the victim.

Very impressive. But not the same as the actual event of a bullet hitting a finger.



(Lecturer: rehearse animations so you are ready to click through this) ANIMATION: All the answers are hidden. Only the Image, headline and “Direct Evidence” and “Arm’s Length Evidence” come up automatically. When you’re ready, each successive click brings up a new bullet point, starting with the direct evidence side of the chart, followed by Arm’s Length.

USE THIS EXERCISE TO BRIDGE TO NEXT WEEK, WHEN WE THINK ABOUT SOURCES. MAKE SURE TO PROBE STUDENTS UNTIL THEY OBSERVE HOW MUCH OF THE EVIDENCE PROVIDED IS HUMAN EVIDENCE...SOURCES.)

Now, to prepare for next week’s lecture, which blends these lessons with a lesson about sources, let’s analyze the SB WORLD front page story on the drunk driving fatalities.

ASK: What DIRECT evidence would be most helpful in this story?

(Have a student write class’ responses on the blackboard, then click to bring up comprehensive list)

DIRECT: Driver of car; Eyewitnesses; Breathalyzer report; Driving records; Accident reports for that roadway.

ARM’S LENGTH: Driver’s lawyer; Campus police (unless witnessed); University officials; Friends and relatives of victims; Family of driver; Students on campus.

## Seeking Truth

Where does the evidence come from?

The source of that evidence can increase or decrease the strength/weight of evidence.

At a future lecture, we will discuss:  
Evaluating Human Sources

Good time to stress:

Sources provide evidence, but are NOT evidence.

We evaluate the reliability of sources.

We determine the strength/weight of evidence.

## Seeking Truth

### Pulling the Evidence Together- Part I

- Consider all the evidence together
- Note any relevant evidence that is missing or irrelevant evidence that's in the way

The more evidence that supports a single conclusion, the stronger all that evidence becomes.

Sources and journalists can provide evidence that is irrelevant to the main issue at hand.

By noting important, but missing relevant information, you put the evidence you do have into a better perspective.

This is all common sense. But recognizing something as common sense and practicing it are two very different matters. For the rest of the semester, you will practice going through the evidence until it becomes both a habit and something you keenly aware of.

## Seeking Truth

### Pulling the Evidence Together - Part II

- If the evidence conflicts, weigh its quality, asking critical questions about its relevance and origins
- Decide whether the evidence is strong enough to have enough confidence to declare something as a Journalistic truth – that is, **THE BEST APPROXIMATION OF THE TRUTH AT THAT TIME**

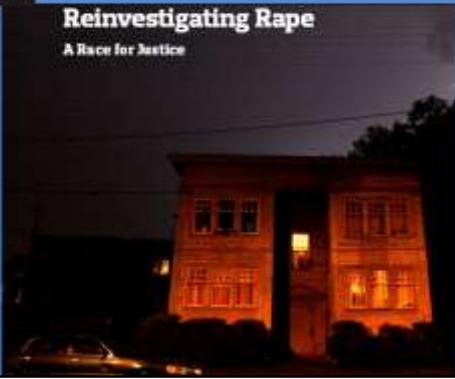
In News Literacy we always force you to come to and state your conclusion. The best decisions you make will be based on your careful consideration of the best available evidence.

## Pulling the Evidence Together: A Case Study

cleveland.com

### Reinvestigating Rape

A Race for Justice



ANIMATION: CLICK 1=ATTORNEY GENERAL LETTER; CLICK2=CRIME REPORT;  
CLICK3=DEFENDANT'S RAP SHEET; CLICK3=IMAGE OF INVESTIGATOR; CLICK4=IMAGE  
OF INVESTIGATOR; CLICK5=STORY REAPPEARS  
CLICK 6=HEADLINE AND PHOTO

From the Investigative Reporters and Editors Website: Cleveland Plain Dealer Reporters Rachel Dissell and Leila Atassi started with a seemingly simple question: how many untested rape kits did the Cleveland Police Department have in storage? The reporters' question prompted Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine in 2011 to ask all Ohio law enforcement agencies to send their rape kits to labs for testing, some of which had been collecting dust for twenty years. Two years later, 59 people have been indicted for rapes committed in Cleveland up to two decades ago.

One of their stories documents how prosecutors had to race against time to file indictments before the 20-year statute of limitations for rape ran out.

They illustrated the situation with a detailed website timeline of just one case, a 1993 rape at 6518 Quimby Ave in Cleveland. They started with the report from the crime lab that a DNA sample from crime scene evidence matched a known criminal whose DNA was already on file.

You see that document and you're told the case is just about to expire.

Next you see the police report filed in 1993. Then you see the rap-sheet of the defendant, material about how the crime lab works and then interviews with the investigators who describe the pressure they were under and the process by which they built the case and got it in front of a grand jury.

ASK: What kinds of evidence are provided?

How do you rate the verification process in this story?

## Three Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does verification sometimes fail?*



## ANIMATION: ON CLICK, “WRONG” SIGN APPEARS

If journalists have this process of verification, how come there are so many corrections printed in newspapers and online.

How come they still get it wrong?

We've seen some bad examples, but also plenty of examples of journalists making a good faith effort to deliver the Truth to you as it unfolds, using direct evidence and arm's length evidence.

The highest profile journalists and those who defend the profession say it is a Discipline of Verification.

If that's true, Why does the press get things wrong?

How does that process of verification break down?



## Why Verification Can Fail

- ✓ Journalists **rush** to get the story first, jump the gun
- ✓ Facing deadline, some journalists get **sloppy** or provide incomplete reports

**Animation: Each check mark fades in on a successive click.**

Here are ways and reasons the verification process can break down.

## Why Verification Breaks Down

✓ People (sources) give reporters incorrect information...  
or outright **lie**

✓ Verification is very **difficult**, even  
when sources are helpful

Animation: Each check mark fades in on a successive click.

Here are ways and reasons the verification process can break down.



Here are other ways or reasons the verification process can break down.

This video of jon stewart lampoons cnn's claim that the boston bomber had been caught – 'it was exclusive because it was ... wrong'



Here are other ways or reasons the verification process can break down.

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## Why Verification Breaks Down

✓ Facing deadline, some journalists get **sloppy** or provide incomplete reports

**The New York Times**

An appraisal on Saturday about Walter Cronkite's career included a number

of ~~some~~ copies, it misstated the date that the Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr. was killed on April 4, 1968, not April 30. Mr. Cronkite

covered the D-Day landings on the beaches in 1944, not 1945. In

addition, Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, not July 26,

1969. CBS Evening News overtook "The Huntley-Anderson Show" in 1967, not 1970.

A communications satellite used to relay correspondents' reports from around the world was Telstar, not Telestar.

Howard K. Smith was not one of the reporters from the field after he died in 1954; he left CBS before Mr. Cronkite was the anchor in 1962; the appraisal also misstated the name of the news agency that Cronkite was Moscow bureau chief after World War II. At that time it was United Press, not United Press International.

## ANIMATION: CLICK1=KING CORREX APPEARS; CLICK2=TELSTAR CORREX APPEARS

When the most famous journalist of all time, CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite, died on July 17, 2009, a New York Times writer got six facts wrong in one story about his career:

**CLICK**The date of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's murder;

–Cronkite covered D-Day from a plane, not down on the beaches;

–Neil Armstrong landed on the moon on July 20, 1969, not July 26;

–Cronkite's show overtook the NBC news in 1967, not 1970;

–**CLICK**The name of the satellite that relayed foreign correspondents' reports was wrong;

–Cronkite, as an anchor never worked with the famed reporter Howard K. Smith. Smith retired before Cronkite became anchor

To its credit, the Times ran this detailed and embarrassing correction.

What was it Grandma used to say, "The hurrier I go, the behinder I get?"

Speed, which is an essential element of journalism, can be an enemy of truth.



**LECTURER'S ALERT: THIS ONE IS REALLY DELICATE. (My advice: If you can't do it without laughing, don't do it.)**

On July 12, reporting on the Asiana Airlines crash at San Francisco International Airport on July 6, 2013, KTVU-TV read out loud AND broadcast graphics purporting to list the names of the flight crew. Because no one caught it, they broadcast a racist/offensive joke in one of the most diverse cities in the country. Immediately after the next commercial break, the anchor reported the list had been confirmed with the National Traffic Safety Board.

Later that month, SFGate, the major online news site in San Francisco, reported KTVU-TV fired at least three veteran staffers.

The NTSB issued its own apology for "inaccurate and offensive names that were mistakenly confirmed" to KTVU. Soon after, the NTSB announced that it had fired a summer intern over the incident.

If journalists (or your Facebook Friends) aren't careful, hoaxes get passed around as facts.



Jumpy after the 9/11 attacks, Americans pay attention when the New York Times starts reporting that Saddam Hussein is assembling the material and machinery needed for a nuclear bomb. Since he has already used chemical weapons on his own citizens, it's an important story.

But it's also wrong.

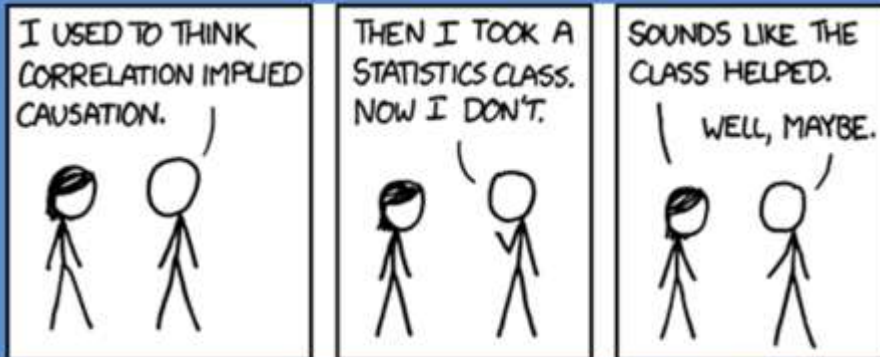
The reporter, Judith Miller, relying on off-the-record sources who want the U.S. to topple Saddam Hussein for them concoct an elaborate yarn and she goes with it.

Surprising Democrats and Republicans alike, U.S. forces invade, route Saddam's army and find no weapons of mass destruction.

It doesn't matter how careful the reporter is. If the person who has the information that is needed decides not to give the reporter the truth...the verification process can't always catch that, although when the Times investigated what went wrong, it found Miller, an intimidating person, had bent or broken many rules of the Times' process of verification.

# Why Verification Breaks Down

✓ INFERENCE DRAWN FROM INDIRECT EVIDENCE IS MISTAKEN FOR DIRECT EVIDENCE



Xkcd.com/552

Perhaps you are already tired of hearing that correlation – the coincidence of two events – is not causation, or proof that one event caused or affected the other...but it bears repeating until you can say it in your sleep.

Going back to the Domino's example, even if Domino's public perception plummeted after the CEO's politicking, do we know that one caused the other?





ALTERNATE SLIDE. REPEATS PRIOR SLIDE

This report cites an article from the [dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk) which actually makes the much weaker claim that “The results showed heavy web users tend to be more depressed and show higher levels of autism traits” which shows a **CORRELATION** between depression and internet use, but not the necessary **CAUSATION** which is reported by IBN

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2280074/Surfing-internet-long-periods-time-cause-withdrawal-symptoms-similar-people-comedown-ecstasy.html>

<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/spending-long-hours-surfing-the-web-leads-to-depression/373610-11.html>



Animation: Each click brings in the next example of Barriers to Verification

Sometimes a news report lacks verification because reporters are barred from collecting evidence, locked out of meetings or refused when they request public information. (At Stony Brook, for example, repeated requests for information about the Campus Police officer who ran over a student have been denied.)

In these case, verification breaks down because of a simple lack of access to the evidence of what is happening.



ANIMATION: CLICK TO ERASE “BODY COUNT 10,000” CLIP, BRING UP AJR ARTICLE.

ASK: Two readings were assigned for today. Who can summarize this report? (the original Picayune Times story)

ASK: Who can summarize this report? (Brian Thevenot’s AJR story about his mistakes)

What lessons, for reporters and for news consumers, did Brian Thevenot offer?

(Should have opened the freezer himself. He would have seen the information was wrong)



The year News Literacy was born as an undergraduate course, Prof. Howard Schneider, who is now Dean of the School of Journalism, started to notice that students, when analyzing a news story, were saying things like, “I’m not sure this reporter opened the freezer...” So that’s become a catch–phrase for News Literacy courses nationwide: **“ALWAYS ASK YOURSELF: TO WHAT DEGREE DID THE REPORTER “OPEN THE FREEZER?”**

If not, why not? And if the reporter is relying only on arm’s length evidence, it’s up to you to decide if the report is reliable. Is there enough corroboration? Are the sources trustworthy? We’ll tackle source reliability in next week’s lecture.

## What if You Demand Verification?



### Code of Ethics

Society of News-Literate Citizens

1. Ask: Did the Reporter Open the Freezer?
2. Follow The Story

Animation: COMPLEX...Slide opens with The SPJ Logo from beginning of lecture. On next click it fades, replaced by a Parody: "Society of News Literate Citizens". On 2<sup>nd</sup> Click the two Key Lessons come up, proposed as a code of ethics for news consumers.

The lesson of examples like the Sandy Hook Shooter or the Hofstra Rapes or even the invasion of Iraq is you have to follow the news every day. If you don't, your knowledge becomes obsolete...you think we found the WMDs the President told us were the reason for the invasion...you think Ryan was the shooter, when it was his brother Adam.

Your judgment and decisions may rest on obsolete information or falsehoods. Worst of all, you'll re-post or re-tweet falsehoods, polluting the Internet with falsehoods.

Remember the Code of Ethics of Professional Journalists we started the lecture with?

(CLICK)

Imagine a Society of News-Literate Citizens...What would a code of ethics for news consumers look like?

(CLICK)

1. An Ethical News Consumer would pay attention to the evidence behind every story, demanding direct evidence whenever possible by always asking Did the reporter "Open the Freezer?"
2. An Ethical News Consumer would keep up with the news, knowing how the truth changes every day.

## Getting Ready for the Next Boston...

### BREAKING NEWS CONSUMER'S HANDBOOK

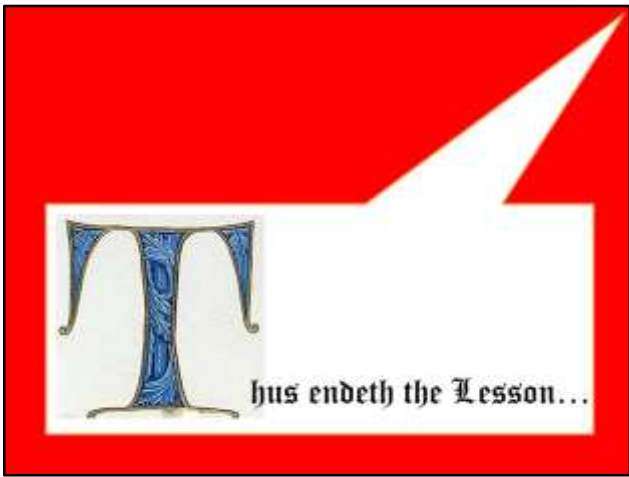
1. In the immediate aftermath, news outlets will get it wrong.
2. Don't trust anonymous sources.
3. Don't trust stories that cite another news outlet as the source of the information.
4. There's almost never a second shooter.
5. Pay attention to the language the media uses.
  - "We are getting reports"... could mean anything.
  - "We are seeking confirmation"... means they don't have it.
  - "[News outlet] has learned"... means it has a scoop or is going out on limb.
6. Look for news outlets close to the incident.
7. Compare multiple sources.
8. Big news brings out the fakers. And photoshoppers.
9. Beware reflexive retweeting. Some of this is on you.

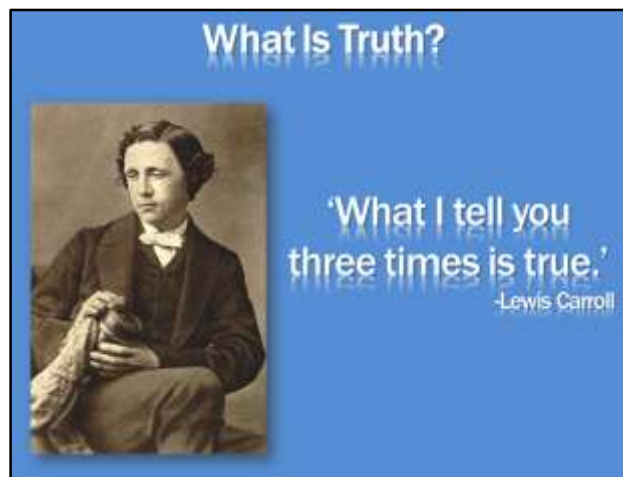
ON **THE MEDIA**

Onthemedias.org

Remember Truth is Provisional  
And Not All Evidence Deserves Equal Weight

Who do you call? Truthbusters? Nope. You have to call on your own critical faculties. Here are a few tips for the next time breaking news, well, breaks





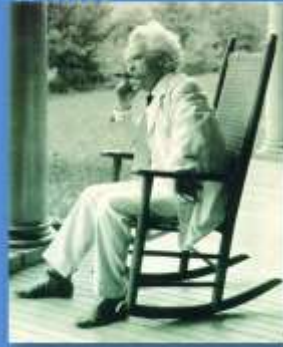
- Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland:  
What I tell you 3 times is true.  
(Repetition of false information can  
create the perception of truth.)



## What Is Truth?

*'Often the surest  
way to convey  
misinformation is to  
tell the strict truth.'*

-Mark Twain



- Twain: Often the surest way to convey misinformation is to tell the strict truth.

Can you think of an example when this was the case?

i.e.

Clinton: I did not have sexual relations with that woman.

Reagan: I did not order Oliver North to swap drugs for guns for the contras.

## What Is Truth?

'Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.'

-Mark Twain



- Twain: “Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.” His quip in response to learning his obituary had been published in the New York Journal (1897)



January 2006, the press corps gathers outside a mine in West Virginia, awaiting word on 12 trapped miners. Geraldo Rivera, Anderson Cooper, Newsday, Washington Post, New York Times, USA Today. They get bad information (based on an overheard and misunderstood shout from the rescue site) and the mining company clams up...All run with it. All wrong...On the left is the first headline. On the right, the next day's embarrassing reversal.

**Papa John's, Applebee's And Others Pay Huge Price For Anti-Obamacare Politicking**

It turns out that being a good corporate citizen is as important to selling pizzas as the thinness of the crust or the quality of the cheese.

If you don't believe it, just ask Papa John CEO, John Schnatter.

According to YouGov BrandIndex, a leading marketing survey that measures brand perception in the marketplace (called "Buzz"), Papa John's had good reason for concern as the pizza chain's brand identity has plummeted from a high of 32 on election day, to a remarkably low score of 4 among adults who

YouGov plc is a company registered in England and Wales

YouGov BrandIndex's "Buzz" score asks respondents, "If you've heard anything about the brand in the last two weeks, through advertising, news or word of mouth, was it positive or negative?" Results were filtered adults 18+ who have eaten at casual dining restaurants in the past month.

**ANIMATION: CLICK1 = LINE CALLOUT TELLING YOU WHO YouGov IS. CLICK2 = YOUNGOV.COM'S DESCRIPTION OF HOW IT MEASURES "BUZZ"**

Any irrelevant evidence in the way? (Any evidence missing? (Corporate description of own actions, Economy's condition, seasonal shifts in pizza consumption, Domino's actual financial outcomes, correlation thereof to "Buzz" score, etc...))

Is the evidence strong enough to declare it true that those three companies paid a "Huge Price" for opposing the Affordable Care Act.