










Lecturer's alerts

(moderate amount of video)

 CBS_binladen.wmv	00:01:03
 climber.wmv	00:01:15
 cooperoil.wmv	00:01:55
 innocence.wmv	00:02:23
 shooting.wmv	00:01:39
 truthiness.wmv	00:01:12
 ward1.wmv	00:00:37
 ward2.wmv	00:01:06
 ward3.wmv	00:01:18

Truth and Verification

*What is Journalism's First
Obligation?*

Why Truth Matters

12 die as Afghan Quran-burning protests resume despite Obama's apology



On February 21, riots erupt in Afghanistan after Afghan workers at the main American military base, Bagram Air Field, see soldiers dumping books in a pit where garbage is burned and notice Qurans and other religious material among the trash.

By Thursday the 23rd, President Barak Obama has written a public letter to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in which he reports the desecration was an accident. He apologizes, but the riots continue and at home in the U.S., Republicans savage the President for apologizing.



The deaths are unfortunate, but perhaps the families of protestors and of U.S. personnel killed last month are mollified to know that at least their loved ones died as a consequence of a real event. The last time this kind of protest arose, it was a reaction to a deeply flawed report by Newsweek Magazine.

On May 9 of 2005, Newsweek reported investigators at Guantanamo prison had placed Qurans on toilet seats and even flushed one. Within a week, there were riots against the US and its moderate Muslim allies, from Gaza to Indonesia.

In all, at least 17 people were killed.

Shortly afterward, it was learned that while various prisoners had made the claim, (in stories in the UK, Russia and on Al Jazeera as well) there was no way to verify the “flushing” story.

June 3, 2005, base commander Brigadier General Jay Hood released his investigation, which found guards had in general followed strict military regulations with four exceptions, none of which approached that level of desecration. Newsweek apologized for prematurely reporting there had been desecrations.

Four Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

Today is a big day.

We tackle an eternal question: What is truth? And THE News Literacy question: how do we find a reliable version of the truth on which to base decisions and actions?

We like to introduce you to new words.

Here's a good one as we work through the questions: Epistemology. That is, the study of Knowledge, or justified belief. The notion of truth is so difficult that academicians spend lifetimes studying the process by which we define truth. So I'd like to warn you today is nothing like a definitive report on this. We are summarizing entire libraries full of ideas.

Events in the world happen independent of our beliefs and in fact independent of whether we are aware of them or not. Earth's climate doesn't warm because scientists say so.

Statements about warming are true or false (scientifically, journalistically, or otherwise) depending on whether or not they accurately represent what is happening.

So here's an important idea about truth.

Our understanding of the truth...our verified beliefs, depend on what information is available.

By studying how journalists pursue truth, how they verify facts and what the risks are, you'll develop the ability to pop the hood on any news story and judge the evidence for yourself...These are the capstone skills of News Literacy and you'll be sharply tested on them.

Here are four questions that frame today's lecture.

Okay, we interrupt this lecture for important housekeeping announcements...



Students can watch Shattered glass using Netflix, using copies at the library or by attending on-campus viewings set up by the Center for News Literacy.

Warn them to wait until after next lecture to write the assignment.

Truth and Verification

*What is Journalism's First
Obligation?*

Now ...where were we?

Not-so simple questions like What Is Truth...

And this question...Based on what you have read, and on what you already believe...What is Journalism's first obligation?

Truth and Verification

*Journalism's First Obligation
Is to the Truth*

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 boils down to the question: How do we know what is true?

Four Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

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 four questions. So, we concede we are glossing over centuries of scholarship...



ASK: So what do YOU mean when you say “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 pastor.)



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.



Truthiness.wmv

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 we aim at ...

(...but we can never be certain about whether we've hit it)



The Truth is the way the world is, how events *really* happened, whether we believe it or not.



Honest truth-seekers gather *JUSTIFICATION* that our beliefs are reliable, and we do this by appealing to *EVIDENCE*.

The process of justifying belief with evidence is **VERIFICATION**

(This is a really wordy slide, violating all design rules. But since students print out the lecture handout, they sometimes appreciate a slide that gives them the full load in text.)

"OMG! Santorum was right!
My Professor is a Relativist!"



More like a Pragmatist:

Multiple partial perspectives give different versions of the "Truth." But they are all perspectives on the same thing, and that thing has properties independent of our beliefs.

The illustration here is a reference to the parable of the blind men and the elephant (Indian in origin, I think). From Wikipedia: *In various versions of the tale, a group of blind men (or men in the dark) touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each one touches a different part, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then compare notes on what they felt, and learn they are in complete disagreement. The story is used to indicate that reality may be viewed differently depending upon one's perspective.* It is notable that the moral of this story is not epistemic relativism, 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 theory of elephants.

A “Pragmatic” Approach to Truth

The Truth is what an *ideal* community of investigators will converge on if given *infinite* time and resources.

The ultimate test of a belief is whether it facilitates reliable action in our daily lives.

That belief is “true” if it *always* works, and *never* fails.

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 a corollary to Moynihan’s Maxim, right? We can have an intelligent opinion about this lectern only if we can at least agree 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...

What Do Journalists Mean By Truth?

- Is getting the facts right the truth?
 - Is being 'objective' the same thing as being truthful?
 - Is being 'fair' the same thing as being truthful?
- Is there one truth we can all agree on?

What do JOURNALISTS MEAN BY TRUTH?

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 this President of the United States born here or not?

Journalistic Pragmatism About Truth
“The Best Available Version of the Truth”

The “best available” evidence
changes from day to day.

So, what is rationally justified is
provisional.

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.

Scientific Theory



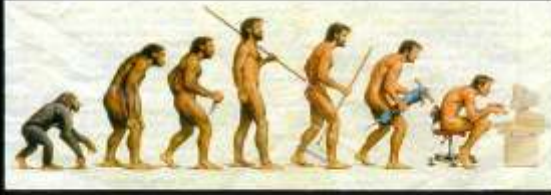
Scientific truth is a statement of probability proportional to the evidence. It will change over time as the evidence changes.

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 are strong similarities between way truth is defined by scientists and journalists.

Here's the phrase: a statement of probability that will change over time as the evidence changes.

Journalism and Science



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



Like scientists, journalists pursue a pragmatic standard of justification. They view knowledge as a tool for reliable action in the world.

In a world where we uncover new information every day and where the changing universe daily reveals itself in new ways, both disciplines seek functional or pragmatic truth that helps explain the world; information we can act upon every day.

At a science center like Stony Brook, it occurs to us that journalism has this in common with science: A search for actionable information.

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Journalism and Science



Like science, journalism employs
a system of peer review.

Both disciplines employ a system of peer review. (Explain: In journalism, there is “peer review” *before* in the form of editing *and after* publication or broadcast in the form of commentary, competitors. 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: RATHERGATE, NYT reporting on Saddam

Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction.

Journalism and Science



Like the scientific method, the journalistic process of verification relies on a system of sorting and testing information

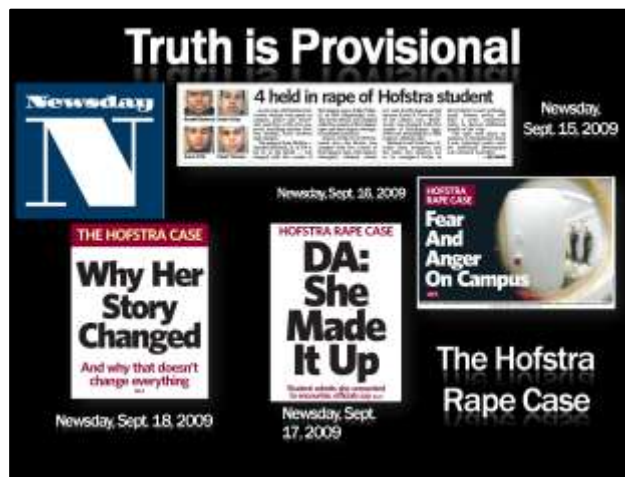
(EMPHASIZE PARALLELS)

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.”



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?



Animation: each successive headline group fades in on a click. 3 total clicks for this slide, illustrating the evolving “truth” after Sendai. Last headline and image is from the CBC. There is a great slider on the photos, showing you then and now shots of the same place.

Can't journalists get anything right?

What WAS the number of deaths caused by the Sendai Earthquake?

Isn't this sloppy, rushing out bad information?

Parts of the area the press reported were safe are now found to be contaminated with rapidly decaying Plutonium, a carcinogen

ASK: Is all this flip-flopping irresponsible? Or is it highly responsible? Why?

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/09/09/f-vp-dale-japan-six-months-after-tsunami.html> – NOTE – very cool “then/now” slider on the pictures in this article.



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?

Journalistic Truth

Journalistic truth is the best obtainable version of the truth on any given day.

It is a continuing journey toward understanding . . . which begins on the first day of a story and builds over time.

Though the pressures of being current and timely force journalists to make fewer inferences and put out stories faster. They are more cautious in that they are less apt to try to draw conclusions, but they also publish more “anecdotal” evidence – relying on what a source says, or what they saw, rather than running test after test to ensure that the reported events are statistically significant rather than anomalous. Hence, while we can definitely say that pictures of events unfold slowly over the course of many journalistic publications (including commentary on those publications), we are likely to see some sharper reversals of journalistic truth as information comes to light. This is why smart news consumers look for reporters who never quit digging.

The Lesson for the News Consumer

Follow
the Story
Over Time

Our knowledge, those verified beliefs, depend on what information is available...and that changes over time.

In all likelihood, none of our beliefs is completely true, though they may have varying degrees of reliability. Therefore 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 data.

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.

Ready?

For news consumers, the LESSON is: FOLLOW THE STORY OVER TIME!!!!

(ANIMATES THREE DIFFERENT WAYS. With each click, repeat the phrase)

Four Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

Let's think now about how one goes about verifying "truth"

Seeking Truth

The Journalist's Discipline of Verification

- Gather, Assess, and Weigh Evidence
- Place Facts in The Big Picture (Context)
- As Appropriate, Adjust Balance or Fairness
- 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.



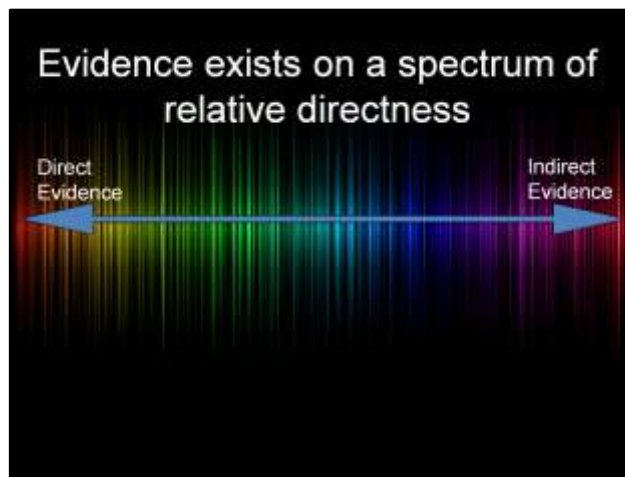
Journalism's discipline of verification calls on its practitioners to seek the truth, a high ideal.

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. Based heavily on inference, arm's length evidence stands up in a logical world...but many events and people aren't logical, which is why we say it 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.

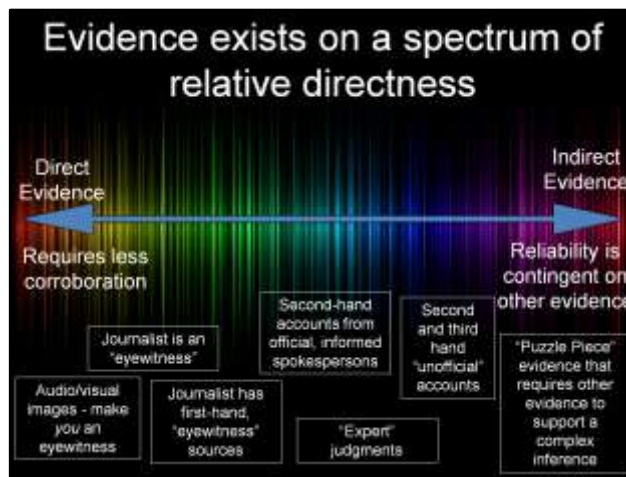
So let's talk about those types of evidence: Direct and Arm's Length.



In your search for reliable information about the world beyond your personal experience, it is helpful to think about how journalists verify their truth.

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?



In the boxes at the bottom of this slide are various kinds of evidence and we have arranged them, generally under the part of the spectrum where they fall, between direct evidence like photographs to Indirect evidence like a series of facts in support of an inference that is sturdy.



This is an overly rigid hierarchy, but it gives us another way to think about how journalists pursue a justifiable, evidence-based account of the truth.

What are the types:

- **Participants and Eyewitnesses** (first-hand accounts)
- **Documents and records** bearing signatures, official seals, date stamps, that forensics experts can use to authenticate the provenance of the document.
- **Photographs and videos** Which, un-doctored, provide a single viewpoint on events. (Only one lens, only one point of view, literally).

And the gold standard: A journalist directly observing events or things for themselves.

Evidence we give great weight has a way of accruing, with one piece of evidence corroborating other pieces. They lean against one another and strengthen one another. (A full discussion of the logic of induction would be nice, but somewhat out of place here,)

I can factually tell you there was a threatened Koran burning in Fort Myers, Florida on Saturday and three days later a riot in Karachi, Pakistan killed four people. Those two facts are true, but is the assembly of them true? Did one cause the other?

Many philosophers of science accept Karl Popper's test: a good scientific theory should make testable predictions.

. So, evidence compiled to rescue one outlying version of events isn't as powerful as evidence that consistently supports multiple versions of the same event..




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.



Climber.wmv

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



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

Documents like this are powerful justification for the belief that President Obama was indeed born in Hawaii.



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

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.



When reporters rush to the scene of a news event like last month's shooting in Cleveland, 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.

Here, a student who was in Chardon High School when the shooting started describes what happened around him.

<http://video.msnbc.msn.com/mitchell-reports/46544275/>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/29/us-ohio-shooting-idUSTRE81S02B20120229>

How Journalists Pursue the Truth

SHOOTING.wmv

News Fellow Insert video here



A lot of solid journalism is produced using eyewitness accounts.

The Innocence Project recently produced a study showing that eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing.

Eyewitnesses are important, but unless there's corroborating evidence, or multiple independent witnesses...it's wise to be skeptical.



News Fellow: Link above-mentioned video here to start automatically.

While eyewitness testimony can be persuasive evidence before a judge or jury, decades of social science research indicates that eyewitness identification is often unreliable.

The human mind is not a digital recorder; we neither record events exactly as we see them, nor recall them like the playback on a video camera. Here's a video on what case, produced by The Innocence Project, a non-profit legal clinic in New York, run by Cardozo Law School.

They are not exactly neutral observers. Their mission is exonerating wrongfully convicted people through DNA testing and to reform the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice.

But this is an example of an eyewitness-based conviction in a rape case. Jennifer Thompson is the rape victim. The last man you see is Ronald Cotton, who was sent to prison for raping her.

How Journalists Pursue the Truth

WARNING: Indirect Evidence

Second and Third-hand accounts
"White House Spokesperson Jay Carney"

Police Commissioners (relaying officer info)

Expert Reconstruction/Re-creation

Sometimes there is no witness, or they are not available, or there is 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 to 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



ANIMATION: Click brings up Quote from Jessica Low

Here's a particularly unreliable piece of information about Spring Break behavior.

ASK: What is the problem with the evidence provided by this student?



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.

Evidence of/for What?



Evidence implies *inference to a conclusion*

Evidence is always evidence of something or evidence for some conclusion. It's not simply naked facts without any context. When we consider the reliability of evidence we should be clear what the evidence is meant to support?



The “evidence for what?” question reveals the quality of evidence as relative to the question being asked. More often than not, a reporter is out to answer a specific, focused question or make some specific, focused claim. If they are good at their job, that question/claim is made clear.

As a reader, you may have questions of your own that are not exactly the same as the reporter’s, but it should go without saying that it is silly to critique a reporter’s evidence for not supporting a claim they never set out to make.

However, beware of reporting whose fairness is suspicious because the headline/lede hints at something that is not very well supported by the evidence given in the article. This is a manipulative trick that can be used by biased media to subtly sway their readers into conclusions that aren’t actually well supported by the evidence. As usual, all this applies, *mutatis mutandis*, for reader bias as well.

Evidence implies a potential inference

This can be like putting pieces of a puzzle together

Types of Inference

Deduction - conclusion is *certain* if premises are true

Induction - conclusion is *likely* if premises are true

Inference to Explanation - conclusion is *likely* if
premises are true **AND** competing explanations
are ruled out as unlikely

Just in case you haven't taken
Philosophy, Rhetoric or a course in the
Scientific Method, let's review terms
that are essential to your critical
thinking process.

Deduction

The truth of the premises allows us to be ***absolutely certain*** of the truth of the conclusion

Example:

All bachelors are unmarried males.

Professor Rosenfeld is a bachelor.

Therefore, Professor Rosenfeld is an unmarried male

Beware of: false premises, “formal fallacies” (e.g. “affirming the consequent” or “denying the antecedent”), and vague/ambiguous terms

Attempt at a deductive inference

2 is False!!!
(or at least
misleading)

- 1) Any person who asks to be paid for sex is a prostitute.
- 2) Sandra Fluke is a person who wants us to pay her for sex.

∴ Sandra Fluke is a prostitute.

The reaction that Fluke, whatever h
committee and said she's having so much sex, she's going broke buying contraceptives and
wants us to buy them. I said, "Well, what would you call someone who wants us to pay for
her to have sex? What would you call that woman? You'd call 'em a slut, a prostitute or
whatever.

In the with the money

Induction

The truth of the premises indicates the *likelihood* of the truth of the conclusion. Inductive inferences presume that patterns that have been reliable in the past will continue to be reliable in relevantly similar situations.

Example:

90% of bachelors are unhappy.

Professor Rosenfeld is a bachelor

**Therefore, it is likely that Professor Rosenfeld is
unhappy**

Beware of: insufficient sample size, biased samples, and "false analogies"

Inductive Inference



Likely conclusion

Evidence of a historical pattern that supports it

The White House says restoring the U.S. manufacturing sector is an essential part of getting the economy back on track.



Over the years, the steady loss of good factory jobs is a big reason why wages have stagnated for people who never went to college, says Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

"The reality is that historically, and at the present still, [manufacturing] is a source of relatively good-paying jobs for people without college degrees," Baker says.

That's about 70 percent of the workforce.

Abduction/Inference to Likely Explanation

A conclusion is *likely* because, if it were true, it would explain why/how known facts are the case (presuming those "known facts" are, themselves, true).

Example:

Professor Rosenfeld is a bachelor.

90% of bachelors are unhappy.

Therefore, it is likely that Professor Rosenfeld just hasn't met the right person yet, since it is unlikely that he would deliberately choose to risk unhappiness.

Beware of: fallacies of causal attribution (e.g. "*post-hoc ergo propter hoc*"), ignoring complex causes, ignoring competing likely explanations, conspiracy theories, pseudoscientific explanations..

Inference to a likely explanation

Likely Conclusion...

Rx drugs reportedly killed Houston, but officials still probing possible drowning



11/10/13, 11:13g. Using body skimmers, reports that Los Angeles County coroner officials but relatives there have not enough water in Houston's lungs to conclude she drowned. Houston's last she may have been before her heart became submerged.

Prescription drugs that have found in the Beverly Hills hotel room where Houston's skeletal body was discovered Saturday afternoon, just hours before a huge Grammy party was set to attend.

On Sunday, the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office said that autopsies on Houston's body has been completed, but official results have been placed on hold, pending toxicology tests.

...would explain the available evidence

Types of Inference

Deduction - conclusion is *certain* if premises are true

Induction - conclusion is *likely* if premises are true

Inference to explanation - conclusion is *likely* if
premises are true **AND** competing explanations are
ruled out as unlikely

How Bold Should Our Inferences Be?

For the reader, it depends on what is on the line...

What is to be gained by being right?



≠



What is to be lost by being wrong?

Do you even need to make a judgment right now, or can you wait?

Having realized that we rarely, if ever, get absolute apdeictic certainty, we are left wondering how confident we ought to be before we actually believe something. The question of how risky our inferences ought to be is a complicated and contextual one. For the reader, it primarily concerns what is on the line in making a judgment/taking action. Do we even need to make a judgment now, or can we afford to wait until we get more/stronger evidence? What is to be gained/lost by making vs withholding judgment, and what is to be gained/lost by making a risky inference vs making a more cautious one?

The contextualism at work here is pretty clearly illustrated by the difference between rolling a die and playing russian roulette. If I say that I will bet you \$20 that I roll a "1," you've got a 5/6 chance of winning that bet, and a 1/6 chance of losing. Most people would take that bet and it is arguably a rational choice to do so. If I ask if you want to play a round of russian roulette, you also have a 5/6 chance of "winning" and a 1/6 chance of losing, but this would be a crazy bet to take. This is because the penalty/reward structure of this gamble is completely different from the die roll.

Reporters have a slightly different penalty/reward structure going on. For one thing, their reputations as trustworthy sources of news are on the line, so they have good reason to be more cautious. As we saw in the Opinion Journalsim lecture, there is a division of labor here, where "straight" news reporters refrain from making anything but the most certain inferences (to say they report "just the facts" is as much of an exaggeration as saying that they are free from bias, but they get as close as they can). Opinion journalists get to stretch a bit farther, but they ought not stretch farther than the available evidence can reasonably support. Stretch too far, and you are in bloviation/bullshit territory. An opinion journalist seeks a different sort of reputation than an investigative journalist, and the sorts of penalty/reward structures at work there allow for bolder inferences.

How Bold Should Our Inferences Be?

For reporters...

Investigative, "straight news" reporters should err on the side of being conservative with their inferences.

Opinion journalists and analysts have a "license to kill" that allows them to be *a bit* bolder and *a bit* less cautious with their inferences.

Note: Opinion *Journalists* still have to verify and justify their claims, they simply have a looser standard of justification that allows them to reach further and make riskier inferences.

Unsubstantiated opinion is NOT opinion journalism.

Having realized that we rarely, if ever, get absolute apdeictic certainty, we are left wondering how confident we ought to be before we actually believe something. The question of how risky our inferences ought to be is a complicated and contextual one. For the reader, it primarily concerns what is on the line in making a judgment/taking action. Do we even need to make a judgment now, or can we afford to wait until we get more/stronger evidence? What is to be gained/lost by making vs withholding judgment, and what is to be gained/lost by making a risky inference vs making a more cautious one?

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**Do we need evidence
to support our
evidence?**

Sometimes.



Use your judgment to determine when a claim is plausible enough to accept without further evidence.

Don't be so picky that you will never be able to make a judgment or take action.

Evidence for What?

Multiple focused stories can be combined as evidence for more complex inferences.



Pay attention to broad context!

Animation note: Here a number of different stories click onto the frame, illustrating the news consumer's search for more and more information/evidence about a subject.

Four Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

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 Breaks Down

✓ 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.

Why Verification Breaks Down

✓ Journalists **rush** to get the story first, jump the gun



Here are other ways or reasons the verification process can break down. **"Dewey Defeats Truman"** was a famously inaccurate banner headline on the front page of the Chicago Tribune on November 3, 1948, the day after incumbent President Harry Truman, in an unexpected outcome, beat the Republican challenger, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey.

The same thing happened when journalists relying on exit polls and statistical models declared Al Gore the winner of the 2004 Presidential Election when in fact the outcome was still close. So close that after a protracted legal battle, the U.S. Supreme Court stepped in and declared George W. Bush the winner.

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 errors. In some copies, it misstated the date that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed and referred incorrectly to Mr. Cronkite's coverage of D-Day. Dr. King was killed on April 4, 1968, not April 30. Mr. Cronkite covered the D-Day landing from a warplane; he did not storm the beaches. In addition, Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, not July 26. "The CBS Evening News" overtook "The Huntley-Brinkley Report" on NBC in the ratings during the 1967-68 television season, not after Chet Huntley retired in 1970. A communications satellite used to relay correspondents' reports from around the world was Telstar, not Teletar. Howard K. Smith was not one of the CBS correspondents Mr. Cronkite would turn to for reports from the field after he became anchor of "The CBS Evening News" in 1962; he left CBS before Mr. Cronkite was the anchor. Because of an editing error, the appraisal also misstated the name of the news agency for which Mr. Cronkite was Moscow bureau chief after World War II. At that time it was United Press, not United Press International.

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:

- 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;
 - 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, is also an enemy of truth.



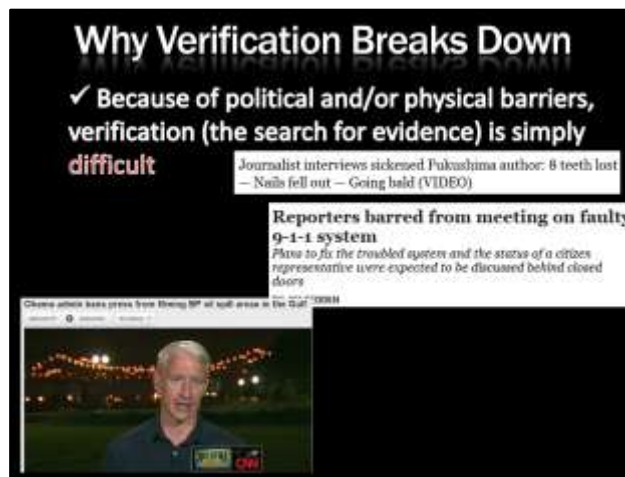
Jumpy after the 9/11 attacks, Americans pay attention when the New York Times starts reporting that Saddam Hussein is assembling the material and machinery needed for a nuclear bomb. Since he has already used chemical weapons on his own citizens, it's an important story.

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.



Here are examples of stories in which reporters are barred from collecting evidence, locked out of meetings or refused when they request public information.

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

Quiz Time:

1. "What event is the subject of the "Myth Making..." reading
2. What major error is the subject of this article?
3. The reporter said he could have avoided the error if he had done one thing. What was it?

(Animation: Click to bring up each question)

We have a suspicion that students are skipping the readings.

So, we're doing some pop quizzes to see if we can verify that suspicion.

Take out a piece of paper and write the answers to these three questions:



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)

Lesson #3 for the News Consumer



Always ask:
Did the
Reporter
Open the
Freezer?

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.

Four Big Questions today:

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

That's a partial answer to the 4th question we built this lecture on. In the real world, we have to weigh a mix of direct and indirect sources, always noting whether the reporter tried for gold-standard, OPEN FREEZER evidence or not.

Pursuing Reliable Information

- 1) *What IS truth?*
- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

I want to start by suggesting that in the real world, we have to weigh a mix of direct and indirect sources, always noting whether the reporter tried for gold-standard, OPEN FREEZER evidence or not.

Certainly photos, videos, authentic documents and personal observation are preferable. But there is good reporting without them, you just want to see if the reporter has corroborated the evidence, tested it for reliability, and told you honestly what is solid and what is not so solid. That transparency is itself a sign of a mature and reliable journalist or organization.

A Big Day: Two Key Lessons

- Follow the story.
- Ask yourself: has the reporter opened the freezer?

If the truth evolves, is provisional, the lesson for good journalists is to keep digging until you get to the bottom of a story.

For savvy news consumers, the lesson is you can't drop in and out and get the "truth" on any one day.

If you do, your information becomes outdated and unreliable...you make poor decisions, take unwise actions, make unfounded judgments.

These are two big News Literacy lessons in one day:

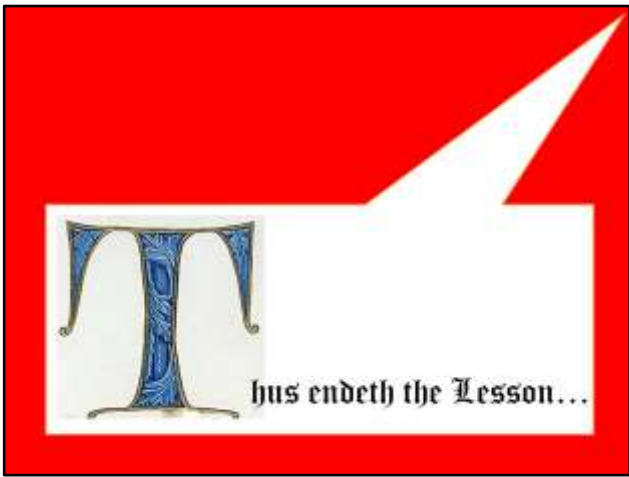
- Follow the story
- Pay attention to whether the reporter opened that freezer to see for herself.

Assignments:

News fellow insert screen grab of assignments page for your lecture!!!!



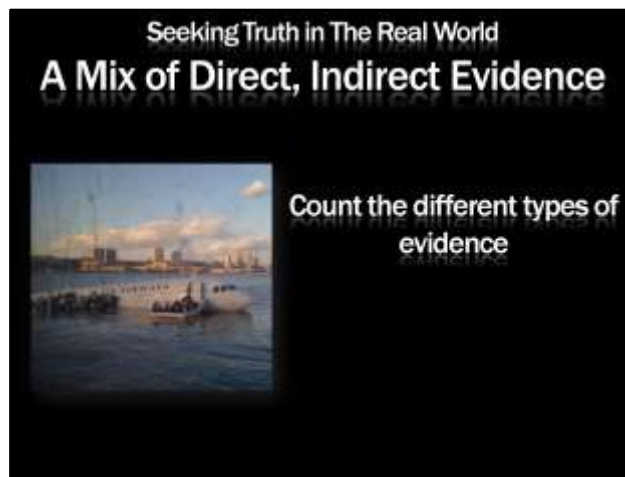
News fellow insert screen grab of assignments page for your lecture!!!!



Why Verification Breaks Down



Here's Anderson Cooper telling viewers why they won't know what's going on with the cleanup efforts after the Deepwater Horizon oil rig blew up in the Gulf of Mexico.



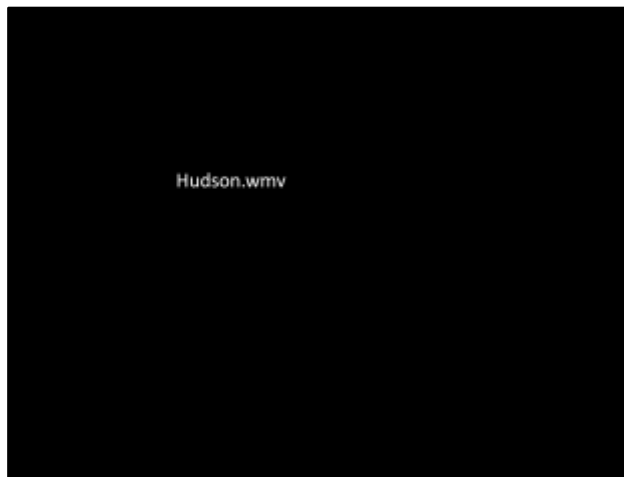
OPTIONAL EXERCISE, BASED ON A CNN PIECE ABOUT THE MIRACLE ON THE HUDSON

Jan. 15, 2009, a plane carrying 115 people crash lands in the Hudson River. Here is CNN's report assembled from a variety of sources.

ASK: Count the different types of evidence, Direct and Indirect



Cell Phone Video
Two-way Radio Traffic From
Recordings from Air Traffic Control
tower
Google Earth recreation of flight path
Still Photos
Interviews.



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

Cell Phone Video

Two-way Radio Traffic From
Recordings from Air Traffic Control
tower

Google Earth recreation of flight path

Still Photos

Interviews.



From your professors.

Here's a new Google Service during Crises like the Sendai Quake. Methods by which to connect with loved ones AND a vetted list of charities.

<http://www.google.com/crisisresponse/japanquake2011.html>

<http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.94aae335470e233f6cf911df43181aa0/?vgnnextoid=3f22acbbc26be210VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD>

<http://www.jrc.or.jp/english/index.html>

How Journalists Pursue the Truth


Photographic evidence



Have individuals with weapons.

Wikileaks released a leaked excerpt of on-board video of a 2007 incident in which a U.S. Army helicopter on patrol killed about a dozen civilians, including two Reuters news service employees. The video was taken on board the Apache during a July mission in which the pilots' conversation can be heard.

Wikileaks spokesman Julian Assange said the U.S. rules of engagement that soldiers must follow when using force, were not followed. Whether you agree or not with his conclusion, the videotape is direct evidence of some elements of what happened.



helliattack.wmv

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

Any explanation of this event, whether favorable to U.S. forces or not, has to explain what this videotape shows.

Going back to the science analogy, No scientists would call current theory “scientific truth” (and in fact, this sort of misunderstanding has been disastrous in popular debates between evolution and creationism). Instead they would describe a process of a picture slowly coming into focus, a picture that aims to be as accurate a representation of what actually happened as possible. And depending on whether it’s a telephoto or a microscope lens, you get all or part of the picture.



In a world where we uncover new information every day and where the changing universe daily reveals itself in new ways, both disciplines seek functional or pragmatic truth that helps explain the world; information we can act upon every day. At a science center like Stony Brook, it occurs to us that journalism has this in common with science: A search for actionable information. Borrowing from *The Matrix*, the terms *Red Pill*, *Blue Pill* have become a popular metaphor for the choice between ignorance between the easy ignorance of the blue or the red, which symbolizes the painful fact that reality changes constantly. Often criticized for emphasizing bad news, journalists shrug it off as the nature of their job: reality isn't all bunnies and rainbows.

**Journalist angry for being
thrown out of mid east**

Cooperoil.wmv

Homer bigart?

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

(After it runs)

Point is, even a diligent reporter can fail to collect reliable information.

How does that happen? That daily battle for control of information is one reason: powerful people and organizations work hard to keep information a secret. But even when people on the inside are helping, it's not always easy to verify a fact.



Generations of physicists based their hypotheses about the universe on the constant "C" which is the speed of light. It's one basis of the theory of relativity and we've long assumed nothing moved faster than 299,792,458 metres per second. 299792458 metres per second. Now scientists at CERN near Geneva Switzerland say they have clocked neutrinos moving faster than light.

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?

<http://www.livescience.com/16506-einstein-theory-put-brakes-faster-light-neutrinos.html>

<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/09/neutrinos-faster-than-light/>



No sooner was that research published, than it was called “wrong” by other scientists with other theories about what happened.

Again I ask: Why should we publish or teach changeable truths?

Is it irresponsible...or is it hyper-responsible to publish before the science is settled?

<http://news.discovery.com/space/faster-than-light-neutrino-theory-almost-certainly-wrong-111012.html>

Truth is Provisional

abc NEWS

Neutrino Not Faster Than Light, Scientists Find Flaw in Test



Researchers have found a flaw in the technical setup of an experiment that startled the science world last year by appearing to show particles traveling faster than light.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/researchers-find-flaw-faster-light-clocks-15768382#.T06SUGVuR5V>

Truth is Provisional

The Washington Post

Posted at 09:42 AM ET, 02/23/2012

Neutrinos are not faster than light — why you should never doubt Einstein

By Elizabeth Flock



http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/neutrinos-are-not-faster-than-light--why-you-should-never-doubt-einstein/2012/02/23/gIQAtQ0IVR_blog.html

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.

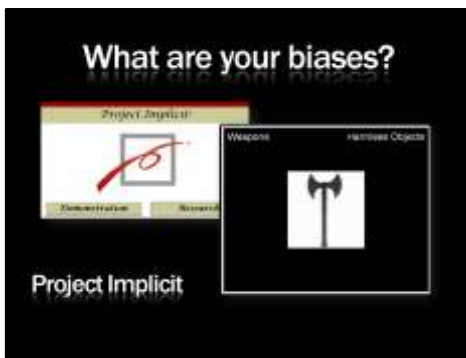
What Is Truth?

'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)



The **Implicit Association Test (IAT)** , developed in 1995 by social psychologists at Harvard and the University of Washington, was designed to detect the strength of a person's automatic association between concepts or objects: i.e.: “Knife Dangerous, Apple Safe.”

A typical Implicit Association Test gives you a pair of categories (**Dangerous / Safe**) and then flashes words in front of you, asking you to categorize quickly. As the test goes on, the categories are complicated and you are pushed to sort items and to work against your assumed categorization.

Your homework this week is to do a light version of the experiment, which will provide the fodder for a short writing assignment.

(Lecturers: Best not to give students this, as it may prime them too much to fight the test. Whether it precisely measures the degree of bias or not, it is a useful tool by which we get students to assess what might trigger confirmation bias, etc. Here are the emerging findings from IAT-based studies published since 1995.

- *More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of web respondents show implicit negativity toward the elderly and a similar proportion show implicit preference for racial White relative to Black.*
- *People, even the IAT's creators and users are often unaware of their implicit biases.*
- *Implicit biases predict behavior. From simple acts of friendliness and inclusion to more consequential acts such as the evaluation of work quality, those who are higher in implicit bias have been shown to display greater discrimination.*
- *Implicit biases vary as a function of the dominance of a person's membership group in society, consciously held attitudes, etc. This last observation makes clear that implicit attitudes are modified by experience.*

Last Week's Lesson: Cognitive Dissonance

"Rarely do any of us sit down before a table of facts, weigh them pro and con, and choose the most logical and rational belief, regardless of what we previously believed..."

-Michael Shermer, author
"Why People Believe Weird Things"

What if you make it a habit to challenge yourself with uncomfortable facts?

Here's another look at last week's key lesson about cognitive dissonance;

"Rarely do any of us sit down before a table of facts, weigh them pro and con, and choose the most logical and rational belief, regardless of what we previously believed. Instead, the facts of the world come to us through the colored filters of the theories, hypotheses, hunches, biases, and prejudices we have accumulated through our lifetime. We then sort through the body of data and select those most confirming what we already believe, and ignore or rationalize away those that are disconfirming."

-Michael Shermer, "Why People Believe Weird Things"

If you didn't run away from cognitive dissonance, but instead consciously decided to go after challenging new information, what might be the outcome?

Truth is Provisional

USA TODAY Your Life

Mammography is 'terribly imperfect,' though recommended



By Sam Haskins, USA TODAY
Rocena Choo, a mammography technologist, performs a mammogram on a patient at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Until two years ago, medical groups largely agreed women should get annual mammograms beginning at age 40. In 2009, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, a group of doctors who evaluate screening tests, broke ranks by encouraging women to talk to their doctors and make up their own minds.

Yet the debate continues. Though few dispute the facts about mammograms, they often disagree on how women should act on results, says Ols Brawley, chief medical officer at the American Cancer Society.

We Extend the Frontiers of Knowledge

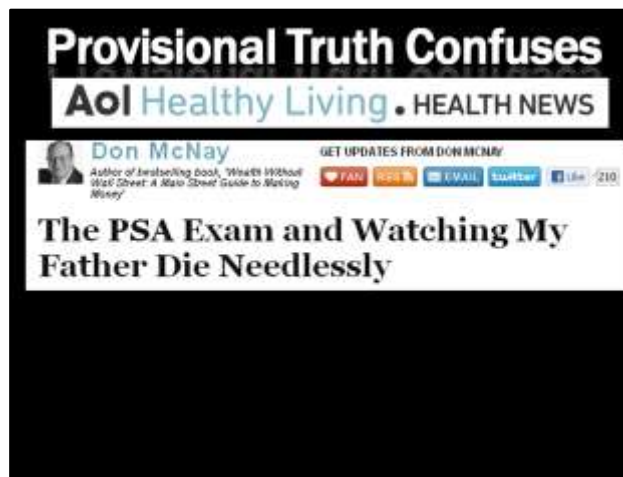
Painful, unpleasant and a necessity, many of your mothers were told. A mammogram, combined with regular self-exams is how you catch cancerous lumps when they are small and can be removed or irradiated quickly.

<http://yourlife.usatoday.com/health/medical/breastcancer/story/2011-10-09/Mammography-is-terribly-imperfect-though-recommended/50713316/1>



Now, a federal health care panel is arguing that there is such thing as too many mammograms.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33973665/ns/health-cancer/t/new-mammogram-guidelines-raise-questions/#.TpXTNGVuR5U>



For my generation, a priority has been convincing our dads that going to the doctor isn't for chickens and that a Prostate Specific Antigen exam now beats prostate cancer later. In the Health and Science sections of websites, newspapers and magazines, stories like this are a staple: Get the PSA Test. Catch Cancer Early.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/don-mcnay/importance-of-psa-exams_b_1004497.html



Now there are several leading medical organizations arguing that there's more risk from the test than is warranted and that false positives cause a lot of misery when men get unnecessary surgery.

WHAT THE WHAT? CAN'T THESE SCIENTISTS GET ANYTHING RIGHT? CAN'T THESE JOURNALISTS GET ANYTHING RIGHT?

The inescapable fact that truth is provisional leads to a lot of cynicism about both science and journalism. When the public doesn't understand the scientific method, or the value of reporting the best version of the truth each day, inevitable changes in the world around us are the root of unskilled critiques.

It's called shooting the messenger

http://www.philly.com/philly/health_and_science/131566278.html?cmpid=15585797

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/07/us-cancer-prostate-idUSTRE79605220111007333>



Here an Al Jazeera English reporter narrates his tape, describing the scenes on the highway outside Tripoli after NATO forces demolished Ghaddafi's troops. Video is long, first 15 seconds are adequate to make the point



ANIMATION:CLICK ONCE TO SWAP FROM HEADLINE/PHOTO TO STORY.

Personal Observation, when possible, is one of the most powerful forms of direct evidence a journalist can bring to a story. Here, the New York Times journalist Tyler Hicks describes how he and his colleagues were captured.

Other possibles submitted by news fellows

Hannity goes off on Westboro Baptist Church instead of trying to get the facts.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14512ad196&feature=related>

Reporter swallows fly, proceeds to change persona completely

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38078871u877>

Angry mob attacks reporter in California (may not fit exactly, but useful nonetheless)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w2j4V9nQ34>



(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 go back and 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.



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.

How Journalists Pursue the Truth Consequences of a failure to verify

Newsweek

How a Fire Broke Out

The story
accuses [Quran desecration, again? Really?](#) 1
The title [Newsweek 2012 is clear](#) 1 in
[How to verify news](#)

By Evan Thomas
NEWSWEEK

Mar 27 issue - By the end of the week, the fire had spread from Afghanistan throughout much of the Muslim world. Even Gaza in Indonesia. After denoting "Shooh rah Raby Bwah!" toward down government buildings and searched the offices of relief organizations in several Afghan provinces. The violence cost at least 17 lives, injured scores of people and was a double tragedy, Washington, where officials focused about the reliability of western agencies in the region.

Newsweek's Quran Reports Leads to 17 Deaths

Verification

The Disinterested Pursuit of Evidence

Everyone – critics and defenders of the press – agree on one thing: Journalism’s overriding goal is the Disinterested Pursuit of the Truth.

ASK: What does that word, “Disinterested” mean? Disinterested doesn’t mean bored.

It refers to your having no stake in the outcome.

“Interest” is a specific legal word at the core of the code of ethics for every profession. In every situation, a professional is trained to maintain clarity about whose interests they serve. For doctors, the health of the patient comes first, for instance, even if the patient is a serial killer.

For realtors, the interests of the seller come first.

Lose clarity about that and you’ll be guilty of what is called a conflict of interests: such as when a realtor is asked to set the selling price on your grandmother’s home. If he plans to buy and flip the home, his self-interest is toxic to the pursuit of an honest appraisal. He might lose a little on commission, but when he flips the house, the low-ball asking price boosts his profit.

Truth and Verification

Disinterested Pursuit of the
Truth

Animation, on click, Disinterested
emphasized in Red



A. The Truth Debate: A *scintillating video*.

Stony Brook Dean of Journalism Howard Schneider debates the meaning of Truth with a philosopher and a scientist to gain insight into different meanings used by different disciplines.

Students are sent to watch the debate on Blackboard

How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Indirect Evidence

Police Spokespersons (relaying officer info)

A former employee who had recently been fired from Palm Bay Hospital returned there Thursday afternoon carrying a gun, holed himself up in an office, then apparently killed himself, officials said.

The incident began about 2:20 p.m., when Palm Bay police got a call from people in the hospital cafeteria who said a man was pointing the gun at anyone who tried to talk to him, said police spokeswoman Yvonne Martinez.

"Initially, when he came into the hospital waving the gun, anybody that attempted to make contact with him or communicate with him he just dismissed and pointed the gun at them," she said. "Clearly, he appeared to be on a mission."



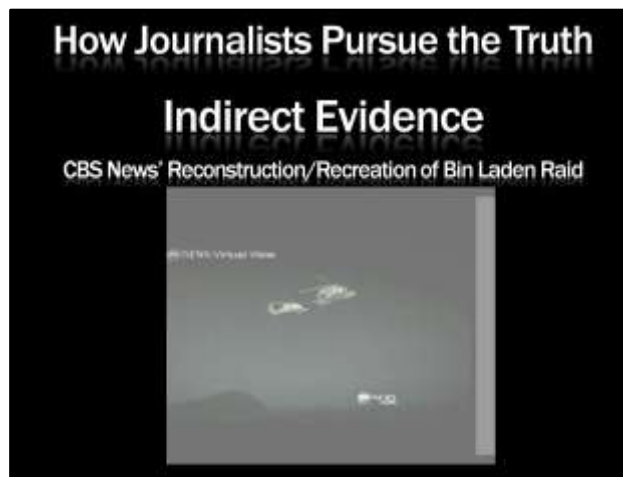
A Palm Bay police officer stands the hood of a lock-down as a gunman approaches himself inside.

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CBS_Binladen.wmv

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Just play it without comment



With CGI and other digital technologies, some news operations have strayed into a weird new territory: the reconstruction. It makes for dramatic TV, but how reliable is that information? Does it matter that it's entirely created in a studio by people who weren't there and are working with whatever information they may have been able to collect?