

Can You Trust The Daily Show to Give You the News?



How informative is the Daily Show?

Does it Alert, Divert or Connect?

Last week we talked about the battle to control information.

That battle is waged daily as information peddlers of all kinds try to get your attention, push a point of view, sell something, promote their self interest, or sell ads around media that entertains you.

It's common for them to try to disguise it as news..

We will begin today to fill out the grid that helps you distinguish different types of information, and establish the first habit of smart news consumers: Always know what information neighborhood you are in.



ASK:

Is Jon Stewart a journalist?

-What is journalism?

-What makes someone a journalist?

(This is just meant to stimulate discussion and set the table for the lecture.)

Here's a Daily Show story about a small political movement to make Long a separate state from New York.

LECTURER: CLICK NOW TO LAUNCH DAILY SHOW SAMANTHA BEE STORY ABOUT LONG ISLAND SECESSION MOVEMENT (2:16)

lisecede.wmv

VIDEO NAMED ABOVE IS IN RESOURCES FOLDER . LINK HERE.

AFTER VIDEO RUNS...

ASK: So...Is it Journalism or Not?

What's the evidence for your answer?

Today we begin narrowing our focus.

We started with an overall history of information revolutions.

We studied the battle to control information.

We debated the role of the free press in our democracy.

Today, we begin to ask How do you sort out what is actionable and what is not? What is journalism and what is hype, spin, junk and propaganda?

?

Why does it matter?

Can you trust an ABC News station?

KABC Allergies VNR.wmv

You're on a business trip to Los Angeles, watching the evening news in your hotel room when this report on allergies airs.

You or someone in your family has been more allergic than usual this year, so it gets your attention.

LECTURER: CLICK NOW TO LAUNCH VIDEO

ASK AFTER: What makes this different from The Daily Show?

What makes it trustworthy?

Would you seek out this test?

(It's a two minute news segment on a blood test that can help diagnose allergies in children. What the station didn't tell its viewers was that the entire story was built from a video news release (VNR) funded by Quest Diagnostics. Don't spill this, lecturer. We'll come back to it)



ANIMATION:

CLICK 1=NEIGHBORHOOD SIGNS CLOG THE SCREEN

CLICK 2=NEIGHBORHOOD SIGNS FADE, REVEAL KEY LESSON

The daily digital tsunami can be pretty overwhelming.

CLICK1. Companies are spending a lot of money to promote their products, betting that you won't notice the difference between Publicity, Advertising and Journalism. And during an election season, candidates are making the same bets, spending millions of dollars to convince you to do what they want.

CLICK2. But with a little practice, you can filter out the junk, by navigating out of information neighborhoods you don't want, and into those you do.

Lesson of the Day:

**KNOW
YOUR
NEIGHBORHOOD**

It's Easy to Get Lost

Here is the point of this whole week's work: Know your neighborhood.

Write that in big letters in your notes.

It's easy to get lost with so much information out there. Worse, there are people whose job it is to mislead you, for political gain or for business reasons.

Last week we talked about the idea that knowledge is power and ignorance is weakness. This is a corollary to that. If you don't know what kind of information neighborhood you're in, you could get ripped off or join a dangerous mob or embarrassing parade.



Housekeeping, Announcements & Notes

Mark Your Calendar

Extra Credit Opportunity #1

My Life As...a wrongly-convicted man and the reporter who told his story.

October 8, SAC Auditorium

Doors Open 7:45 for 8 p.m. start

No ticket required

TEST #1

In Recitation,
week of
October 6

Last week's Quick Quiz results

1. "Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets," said Napoleon Bonaparte, military genius and Emperor of France.
2. On September 29, 1690, British Colonial authorities in Boston shut down the first multi-page newspaper in the Americas, which was called "Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick."

Student Questions and Comments:

Is social media more reliable because people post pictures of what governments try to hide?

What laws restrict the press in the U.S.?

Talk about the Snowden Leaks!

How can we measure how much the U.S. censors?

Good enough

More video

Dreading the Football...

How are these quizzes graded

Can talk more about current events

Don't spend so much time in the beginning on things you said last time

After this lecture, students will be able to:

- 1. Use a standard taxonomy to precisely distinguish between information neighborhoods.**
- 2. Articulate how three traits define journalism as a source of reliable information.**
- 3. Use specific events and examples to illustrate clear understanding of independence and accountability.**
- 4. Make preliminary inquiries that reveal the reliability of a piece of information.**

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.

When every day is an information tsunami
How do we sort through it all?

Verification

Independence

Accountability

(Mnemonic device: "VIA")

ANIMATION: EACH CLICK BRINGS UP A WORD

For the purposes of this course, here is what we mean by these familiar words:

--**Verification:** The process that establishes or confirms the accuracy or truth of something.

--**Independence:** freedom from the control, influence, or support of interested parties.

--**Accountability:** Responsible or answerable for your work.



**ANIMATION: CLICK1=VERIFICATION,
CLICK2=INDEPENDENCE, CLICK3=ACCOUNTABILITY,
CLICK4=V.I.A SWEET SPOT**

You know about Venn Diagrams? They're another way to think about this if you don't like the neighborhood idea. The reliable information we're teaching you to seek has not just one or two of these characteristics. It has all three.

These are three terms students are expected to begin using to characterize information in class and in homework assignments, starting today.

A lot of things try to look trustworthy by looking like journalism. People wish to wear the mantle of journalism, but refuse to submit to the collar that restricts journalists from some parts of life everyone else takes for granted, like political activism, free expression of opinions and even the friendly acceptance of free drinks and meals from business acquaintances.

We propose that only at the intersection of all those characteristics lies the sweet spot where you'll find actionable, reliable information.

That's the standard journalism claims to hold itself to: **Verification, AND Independence AND Accountability.**

Using a Simple Chart to Find Reliable Information

A Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods

	Verification	Independence	Accountability
Advertising			
Promotes Publicity			
Propaganda			
Entertainment			
News			
Raw Information			

Critical thinking: clarity about differences among similar things

IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY, TAKE OUT YOUR TAXONOMY CHART.

Today, you'll start using a new set of critical thinking skills that will help you decide for yourself in a logical way. We'll give you vocabulary to articulate your findings.

A word I want you to memorize and learn today:

Taxonomy...An arrangement of objects or ideas into a hierarchy or systematic set of classifications.

To help you educate your mind in this way, we have built this grid. Once you can fill in this grid with precision, you will have taken the first major step toward becoming News Literate.

A taxonomy works like this: You are not in NY Chinatown unless you are in New York City, AND in Manhattan AND downtown somewhere between Grand and Worth, Allen and Lafayette.

Using the Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods, we will characterize information in a systematic way that highlights the distinguishing characteristics of news, promotion, propaganda, and raw information, all of which are subsets of Information in the same way Park Slope is to Brooklyn is to New York City.

How Is News Different?

A Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods

	Verification	Independence	Accountability
Advertising			
Promotion/Publicity			
Propaganda			
Entertainment			
News	Journalism is defined as a process of verification that aims to confirm or establish facts.	A code of ethics forbids journalists from joining or working for any interest group.	Journalists sign their work and are responsible for its accuracy. They correct errors publicly.
Raw information			

Clarity about differences among similar things

One mark of an educated mind, in any field, is a muscular kind of critical thinking...the ability to sort similar ideas or objects into subgroups according to important distinctions. That's why every specialty uses a Taxonomy, which is a system of classification. Think of the categories in the library. You'd be lost without those last few Dewey Decimal points.

You cannot succeed as an engineer, doctor, lawyer, banker, businesswoman or biologist unless you are able to see and describe distinctions.

As we practice these skills today, we'll continually return to these questions:

How is news different from other information?

How can we tell the difference?

AVOID: Long conversations about the other categories. This is News Literacy, not Media Literacy. For the purposes of this course, there is news and then there's everything else. The point of this lecture is to teach students to default to VIA to figure out what neighborhood they are in.

Advertising

Merchants pay to have advertisements placed on billboards, in newspapers and broadcasts or on websites to merchants' specifications.



Price, Features, Urgency, Seller

Let's start with definitions.

(On slide)

Characteristics of the Advertising neighborhood:

- Opportunity to buy.
- The Price
- The features of the product.
- An advertiser pays to deliver their information to you exactly as they want it.



ANIMATION:

CLICK1=FOOTBALL PLAYER CELEBRATING A TOUCH-DOWN. WITH AUDIO
CLICK2= CAPTAIN MORGAN AND CAPTAIN MORGAN BOTTLE. WITH CASH REGISTER AUDIO.

Similar to Advertising , but distinct is Publicity.

Publicity or “PR” (Public Relations) is the process of attracting attention in a positive way. There’s no overt “*Buy This Product, On Sale Today at 23rd Street and v3rd Avenue*” message.

Instead, classic PR tools include sponsorships, staged events, product placement, press releases, carefully worded public statements and other efforts to make goods, services and personalities more appealing.

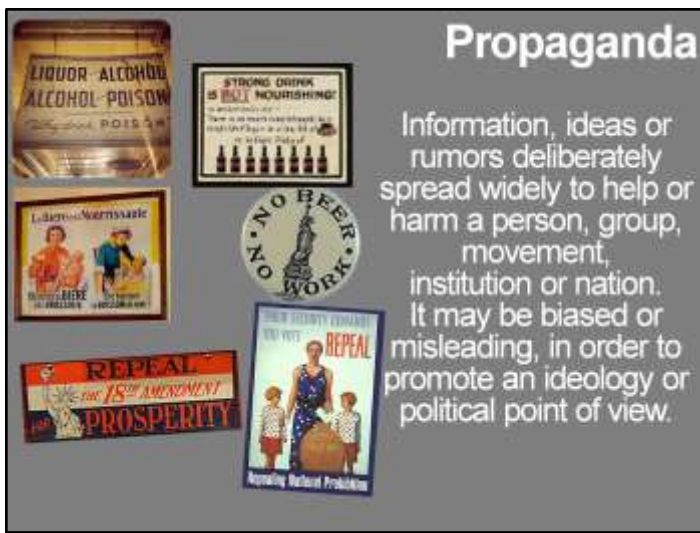
CLICK 1 In 2009, Philadelphia Eagles Tight End Brent Celek celebrated a touchdown with this odd pose in the end zone, which...it turned out, was part of a publicity campaign by the makers of Captain Morgan rum.

CLICK 2 For every time a player was caught on camera striking the "Captain Morgan" during a regular season game, \$10,000 would be donated to Gridiron Greats. For each instance in the playoffs, the donation would elevate to \$25,000. And for instances in the Super Bowl, the bounty was slated to hit \$100,000 per pose.

Even when the NFL put an end to Captain Morgan-ing, the publicity stunt succeeded, by making people talk about the rum.

It’s not directed at a sale. It’s more strategic: Make Sure People Know Your Name. Publicity, as we said, is less in-your face.

ASK: Which is more effective...Ads or Publicity? Why?



ANIMATION: CLICK 1= DEFINITION

ASK: What is Propaganda?

So you know, Propaganda isn't the tool of just one ideology. In fact, it wasn't always considered a negative. The word was coined by the Roman Catholic Church to describe its efforts to make religion appealing.

CLICK: For the purposes of this course, here's our shared definition of propaganda.

ASK: How does it differ from Advertising and Publicity?

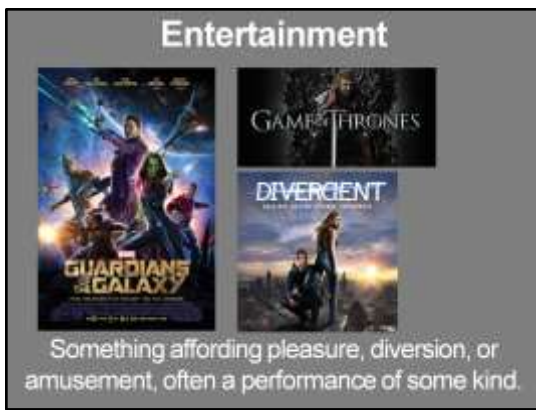
(Ads are aimed at sales. PR is aimed at branding. Propaganda is political.)

Propaganda, Modern

Posters photographed by Professor Miller Sept. 5 near Times Square



The best propaganda includes truth and uses it to make the government's point, or the point of a political party or religious organization. In these posters, which were plastered on a construction site near Times Square in September of this year (2014), the Russian government's propaganda arm "Russia Today" seeks to cast itself as the honest broker of information by demonizing the U.S. Government for its Iraq War mistakes. Did President Putin tell the truth about Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian civil war?



ANIMATION: CLICK = DEFINITION OF ENTERTAINMENT

Next neighborhood. Next category on your Taxonomy chart.

ASK:

What kind of information do you gather when you are watching a movie or playing a video game? Is any of it actionable?

CLICK. For the purposes of this course, here's what we mean by Entertainment: something affording pleasure, diversion, or amusement, often a performance of some kind.

(As opposed to recreation, an activity in which you participate, this is media you consume.)



Raw Information: Information that has yet to be examined or verified. It is unfiltered information that bypasses traditional gatekeepers and mediators.

This example is a cellphone video that surfaced the week of September 8, which may show two witnesses to the Michael Brown shooting, yelling at the police, apparently for shooting Brown while his hands were up in surrender.

Until the date and place and time is verified and the context of the men's actions is filled in, what can we conclude? Is this a reliable account yet. When might it become reliable? (When verification and context are added.)



ANIMATION: CLICK = OPFERGUSON apology
Tweet covers original, erroneous, posting by Anonymous.

As fresh and exciting as it is, Raw and unfiltered information such as that cranked out by OPFerguson, an Anonymous-linked social media activist, can be grossly wrong.

When police refused to name the officer who shot Michael Brown, Anonymous went on the hunt for him and posted this material.

It was wrong.

Click

“Think Twice”

A Silent Minute to Absorb the Material

ANIMATION: Click once to start the fade-out, fade-in, which takes one minute

At Stony Brook, we’ve become interested in the effects of silence in the classroom.

At summer workshops in 2013, we began breaking up intensive lecture or discussion sessions with a minute of silence. It made participants uncomfortable the first time, but over the course of a few days they became quite enthusiastic about pausing every so often to let ideas sink in or to simply reflect. We find it works well to ask a question and then call for a minute of silence. This slide is built to fade to black and then come back, all in one minute

ASK STUDENTS IF INFORMATION IS WORTH THE COST

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/8841649/Silence-is-golden-how-keeping-quiet-in-the-classroom-can-boost-results.html>

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec09/vol67/num04/Silence-Is-Golden.aspx>



(Animates automatically. No click needed)

If only life were as tidy as our taxonomy chart...

But it's not and so it is time to talk about the ways these lines blur from time to time. Take historical films. They are a great way to get people interested in historic events.

But films like Zero Dark Thirty and Argo are marketed as "Based on a True Story"

ASK: What is the danger to you if you accept their re-creation of historic events?

(The runway chase scene in Argo never happened and Zero Dark Thirty suggests – despite much debate to the contrary – that torture worked.)

Blurred Lines
News vs. Entertainment

A Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods

	Verification	Independence	Accountability
Entertainment	Entertainment is defined as a process of verification that aims to confirm or establish facts.	A code of ethics forbids journalists from joining or working for any interest group.	Journalists sign their work and are responsible for its accuracy. They correct errors publicly.
News	Journalism is defined as a process of verification that aims to confirm or establish facts.	A code of ethics forbids journalists from joining or working for any interest group.	Journalists sign their work and are responsible for its accuracy. They correct errors publicly.

“What is the Danger” in films embellishing the truth?

The danger is that films are more memorable than history books and people end up believing nonsense. Drama and journalism have vastly different purposes, even when addressing the same set of historic events.

We offer some simple ways to clarify the reliability of Hollywood history: If it has actors in it and the word drama in its description it is entertainment, not news.

Watch for the disclaimers, i.e. “based on facts” or “docu-drama” Pay attention to the use of recreations of the action and scene, etc. If those techniques are used, can that version of the events be verified? Is the film-maker independent (neutral) and who is accountable for the truth of the “report.” If it is produced by the entertainment division of that television network or cable company or film studio, it is not journalism. The success is measured by ticket sales or ad revenues or audience, not accuracy.

Again, we can debate the fine points of this, but the point of today’s lecture is that when you’re looking for actionable information, basically there is journalism and then there’s everything else. That’s not to say journalists are saints. Just that journalism the way we define it (Verification, Independence, Accountability) is more reliable.



Be aware that the neat and tidy lines of the Taxonomy can get a little blurry. Here's a typical day on TMZ's homepage.

Even though it's about sports and celebrity, does that mean it itself falls in the entertainment category?

Or is it a specialty news show?

So...how would you make one of those careful distinctions between news and some other neighborhood?



This is information that Diverts or even Connects us, but is it news?

Is there a journalistic rationale for this story?

... other than to promote or enhance the subject of the story?

In this case, many magazines hoped for exclusive photos of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's newborn twins. In exchange for \$2 million donated to the family's "Jolie-Pitt" Foundation for charity work, the star couple gave People magazine an exclusive.

Typically, when People does a story like this, the celebrity may be given the questions in advance and can send back answers typed up by...the celebrity or her/his publicist.

What pressures might be brought to bear on a news organization when it knows a famous face on the cover can guarantee big sales of the magazine and huge website traffic? Do they promise to take it easy on somebody in return for that big payday?

We'll return to these questions in a few weeks, but entertainment is an area where information may look like reliable news when it's really a form of publicity or, arguably, advertising.

What is News?

Timely information of some public interest that is shared and subject to a journalistic process of **verification**, and for which an **independent** individual or organization is directly **accountable**.



Maybe it will help settle those murky descriptions if we get around to the final definition: What is News?

For the purposes of this course, here's our definition.

“Timely information of some public interest that is shared and subject to a journalistic process of verification... and for which an independent individual or organization is directly accountable.”

A mouthful.

But like any good definition, it helps you distinguish news from things that merely look or sound like news.

When you work on the taxonomy, remember it is only news when you have all three: V.I.A.



The principal value of the Taxonomy is that it helps you to decide for yourself what is journalism. Regardless of what label is adopted by the person who is delivering the information, you keep an eye on the three traits that distinguish journalism: Verification, Independence, Accountability. Wikileaks founder **Julian Paul Assange** says Wikileaks has released more classified documents than the rest of the world press combined: “Verifies the material he broadcasts? Independent of affiliations? Accountable? Is he a journalist?”

Bill O’Reilly, for many years a TV reporter, now has a Fox TV talk show host with killer ratings. Fans call him a defender of the Constitution and defender of traditional conservative values. Critics say he is a one-sided ranter playing politics while wrapping himself in the neutral mantle of journalism. How would you decide? Verifies the material he broadcasts? Independent of affiliations? Accountable to whom? Is he a journalist? Why does it matter?

Gayle King, co-anchor of CBS This Morning, was a reporter before being hired in 1981 as anchor at WFSB in Hartford, Connecticut, where she worked for 18 years. Now she is co-anchoring the morning news on CBS with Charlie Rose. But when you watch her discuss her battle with breast cancer, and interview actors flogging new movies, or authors making diet meals...do you see independence, verification, accountability? Is she a journalist? Why does it matter?

Diane Sawyer, Anchor of the ABC Evening News. Verifies material before broadcast? Independent of affiliations? Accountable to whom? Is she a journalist?

Jon Stewart hosts an evening show that features interviews with key political and cultural figures, “Correspondent” reports on current events and issues, and Verifies material before broadcast? Independent of affiliations? Accountable to whom? Is Jon Stewart a journalist?

Glenn Greenwald was a constitutional and civil rights lawyer who became a political commentator, blogger and author. He was a columnist for Salon.com and then a contributor to The Guardian, as well as other

national publications.



ANIMATION: CLICK= ALL FACES SPIN, then stop

Journalists define themselves in lofty terms like this, from the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. Seek Truth and Report it, BUT, don't do unnecessary harm, BUT don't be unduly influenced by one side of a disagreement, nor by your advertisers and competitors AND Be Accountable.

Find someone sharing information who is doing all those things, and we posit they are a journalist committing journalism, which is the sharing of information that has these three characteristics:

V

I

A

What Makes News Different?

Verification

Process that establishes or confirms
the accuracy or truth of something

ANIMATION: CLICK BRING UP DEFINITION
Let's look at some examples that help
define these terms.

-- Verification: A process of collecting
evidence that establishes or confirms the
accuracy or truth of something.

(This is a good place to plant seeds about
evidence and inferences, which are often
unsound. Introduce the phrase:
“Correlation does not equal causation” as
an example of inferences that may not be
sound.



Verification means not just taking one person's word for it.

In this December 2009 story about polluted water systems , The New York Times compiled and analyzed millions of records from water systems and regulators around the nation. The documents showed Safe Drinking Water Act violations have occurred in every state.

In Ramsey, N.J., for instance, water tests since 2004 have detected illegal concentrations of arsenic, a carcinogen, and the dry cleaning solvent tetrachloroethylene.

In New York state, 205 water systems have broken the law by delivering tap water that contained illegal amounts of bacteria since 2004.

What Makes News Different?

Independence

Freedom from the control, influence, or support of interested parties, coupled with a conscious effort to set aside any preexisting beliefs and a system of checks and balances.

ANIMATION: CLICK BRINGS UP DEFINITION

Independence: freedom (of the journalist and the journalism organization) from the control, influence, or support of interested parties.

As important, (since objectivity is a fictional state of mind) Independence is guarded by a journalist's conscious effort to set aside pre-existing beliefs and be intellectually independent AND by a system of checks and balances by peers with the same goal.

ASK: What Other Professions attempt independence? (Judges, police, doctors, brokers, accountants cannot serve both their own personal interests and the interests of those they serve. Like journalists, they are bound by rules that pre-empt conflicts of interest.)



Was this mayor, who submitted little news reports about his small city to the region's major newspaper, producing journalism? Certainly he could verify, since as mayor he would know what the city was up to. But was he independent? What might be the primary goal of his reports? It's basically propaganda, isn't it? And if he used a false identity, how could he be held accountable for the facts and balance of those reports?

Professional Journalists have developed guidelines to make Verification, Independence and Accountability concrete. The purpose is to reduce the impact that power, title or money can have on the integrity of information.

Here's what the SPJ Code of Ethics says:

“Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public’s right to know.”

(extra below)

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, travel, and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, political office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705394131/West-Valley-City-mayor-admits-using-false-identity-to-write-news-stories.html>

Clarity about conflicts between personal interests
And the public interest defines journalism's ethic of
neutrality



ANIMATION: HIT PLAY BUTTON TO AUTOMATICALLY SPINS THE VITRUVIAN MAN IN, IN ADDITION TO THE FOUR AREAS IN WHICH OUR INDEPENDENCE IS CHALLENGED.)

journalists are, like all of us subject to the pressures of their personal interests:

RELIGIOUS/POLITICAL It takes an act of will to be neutral about the religious (and political) beliefs and comrades we choose;

INTELLECTUAL: It requires self-knowledge prevent our education and unique experiences from clouding our ability to observe the world in a neutral way;

FAMILIAL/ROMANTIC: Every profession's code of ethics warns that you cannot ask people to believe you can be neutral about the family we are born into, the family we spawn and those we choose to love.

FINANCIAL: And when our income or assets are imperiled, we can't be expected to make an independent or neutral observation.

We use DaVinci's Vitruvian Man to illustrate the journalist's aspiration to be **INDEPENDENT** observers, with each limb representing the potential challenge to independence
CLICK VIDEO PLAY BUTTON.

We also use Vitruvius because we find there's nothing like full frontal nudity to wake up a roomful of snoozing undergraduates...



Like individual journalists, the organizations that broadcast and publish information are pulled on all sides by owners, customers, suppliers and competitors.

An ethical organization is open and transparent about those forces and takes steps to prevent those forces from skewing information.

Possible? Perhaps.



ANIMATION: CLICK BRINGS UP DEFINITION

ANIMATION: CLICK1 SPLATTERS THE PAGE WITH BYLINES.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Responsible or answerable for your work.

Journalists put their name on their work. In many cases, their email address or phone number is attached to each report. That way, if the report is factually wrong, a news consumer or subject of a news story can report the mistake.

And if a mistake is discovered, a journalist goes through the embarrassment of publishing a correction.

ASK: What other professions or crafts do this?



When social media activists like OPFerguson (a Twitter handle) or Oops777 (a subreddit) make mistakes that harm people, like the man wrongly named as the Ferguson police shooter in the Michael Brown case, or the two men wrongly identified as the Boston Marathon bombers...who is accountable?

Shortly after the 2011 Tucson shooting, NPR, CNN and NewYorkTimes.com reported Congresswoman Giffords had died of her head wounds. All three soon discovered their errors and published corrections and apologies. That's what we mean by accountability.

. Here's the applicable section from SPJ's industry-standard code of ethics:

“Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other. Journalists should:

- *Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.*
 - *Encourage the public to voice grievances against the media.*
 - *Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.*
 - *Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.*
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others”*



Much of the daily digital tsunami is made up of information that seeks reliability by trying to look like journalism. People wish to wear the mantle of journalism, without submitting to the collar that restricts journalists from some parts of life like political activism, free expression of opinions and even the friendly acceptance of free drinks and meals from business acquaintances.

We propose that only at the intersection of all three characteristics (Verification, Independence, Accountability) will you find actionable, reliable information, information you'd share to a loved-one.

(Note to lecturers. In keeping with recent research on memory, I like to make students sing and dance key concepts. I split the room in three and have each one sing a letter – V. I. A.- in the triad of a major chord. This year, I'll also ask them to stand and do the letters with their arms, ala The Village People in "YMCA".)

“Think Twice”

A Silent Minute to Absorb the Material

ANIMATION: Click once to start the fade-out, fade-in, which takes one minute

A lucky coincidence V.I.A. launches a powerful word: "VIABLE"

viable (ˈvaɪəbəl)
adj
1. capable of becoming actual, useful, etc; practicable: a viable proposition.
2. (Biology) (of seeds, eggs, etc) capable of normal growth and development
3. (Gynaecology & Obstetrics) (of a fetus) having reached a stage of development at which further development can occur independently of the mother.
(C19: from French, *viats* *vie* life, from Latin *vita*)
via *bi*lly //
Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2008

ANIMATION: CLICK1=Dictionary definition wipes slowly into view.

Stan Zoller, a News Literacy teacher from Chicago, shared this fine idea of his with us.

Our Mnemonic device, VIA, launches a powerful word: VIABLE

CLICK

It has mostly biologic meanings, which are rich metaphors for the power and the value of reliable information that passes the VIA test.



ANIMATION ALERT: THE three lobes of VIA wipe in and out

To help you begin sorting through the daily digital tsunami, we've invented the all-new quiz show: "VIABLE: Steering toward reliability"

Here's how it works.

First we'll show you an item.

You'll decide which neighborhood it belongs in.

And then, you'll explain why it is or is not...VIABLE?

Is this reliable information you could use to make a good decision, take an action responsibly? Should you share it on social media?

A quick way to navigate away from shoddy information and toward reliable is to keep VIA in mind.

I'll walk us through the first example.

The point is to start using VIA in real time, to navigate information neighborhoods skillfully.

What Neighborhood are you in?



How many of you look at user ratings before you buy something or go somewhere? They promise honest feedback from people just like you who are looking to save a buck or find the best...meal or music or car.

When you go to a crowd-sourcing site for consumers, like Tripadvisor™ or iTunes™ or Ebay™ the whole idea is to cut through the BS of advertising and marketing, isn't it?

Is there Verification? (by whom?)

Are the writers Independent? (who are they working for?)

Are the reviewers accountable? (If they screw up, who gets blamed?)

Is it VIABle...?



Using the terms on the Taxonomy chart, give me a detailed account of why it fits in that category. Is it a signed review? Who is accountable? How would you know if the person works for the place...or owns it...or was hired to write the review? Independence is compromised. Here's an idea will start to explore in thinking about where we get information: Self-Interest...versus Independent. Ask: Define those terms.



Animation: Slide loads with Trip advisor logo, which says “Get the Truth. Then Go.”

ANIMATION: CLICK1=headline for an online ad in which a writer offers to write a good review for \$5, CLICK2=ad text, CLICK3= REVIEWS of this fake reviewer.

Well, let’s see.

Verification: Let’s assume for now the reviewers have really been to the restaurant. So they’ve got direct evidence for their statements about the quality of the burritos.

Independence: The whole premise of these sites is that People Like You, just plain everyday customers, are donating their time to write reviews when they get a good or bad meal and that if enough people do that, a restaurant will end up with the rating it deserves.

Accountability: This is the most obvious flaw. Trip Advisor takes no responsibility for the truthfulness of the reviews. And the individual reviewers don’t either. They log on with fake names, which means there’s no way for you to say “Hey...that’s the restaurant owner’s son.”

CLICK1...Uh ohh...you mean some of those reviews might be fake?

CLICK2...

CLICK 3...Irony alert...did the reviewer write their own reviews of their reviews?

What was the key element missing that makes these kind of sites unreliable?

Here’s the great thing about using VIA to navigate toward reliable information.

Even without knowing about these fraudulent reviewers, you would already have discounted the reliability of TripAdvisor reviews, based on the lack of accountability. With no names attached, there’s plenty of room for both paid and unpaid phonies to write reviews. Since they aren’t accountable, what keeps them honest?

*A footnote...



Following up...And while unscrupulous merchants have taken advantage of that lack of accountability, there are other problems with online ratings, apparently. In New York, the state government has declared purchased reviews are misleading and it hands out fines to companies that use them.

But...in California, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled this month (Sept. 2014) that YELP can downplay positive reviews of businesses that refuse to buy ads from...Yelp.

Yelp says that never happens, but three San Francisco business owners interviewed by SF Gate say it happened to them.

We'll talk later this semester about another important element of reliability: TRANSPARENCY.

If you can't see the algorithm that sorts out user comments to come up with YELP ratings, can you trust YELP not to have rigged the deck in favor of people who buy ads on YELP?

VIAble

Steering toward reliability



ANIMATION ALERT: the three lobes of VIA wipe in and out.

Back to the game

Ready?

Which Neighborhood are you in?



Who is this? Apple CEO Tim Cook.

What's that on his left wrist? The new AppleWatch.

Where did most people learn about it?

From Apple headquarters' streaming video feed, showing Cook's presentation about new Apple products to a roomful of reporters and others. So, being a slave of the largest tech company on earth, you logged onto YouTube to watch the exciting reveal.

ASK: What neighborhood are you in when you're watching that live streamed show?

Let's watch!

(Next slide launches an excerpt)

IWATCH.MP4

VIDEO NAMED ABOVE IS IN RESOURCES FOLDER . LINK HERE

CLICK TO LAUNCH

Is this VIAbLe...?



ANIMATION: A SINGLE CLICK SENDS HIM DANCING ACROSS THE SCREEN.

Ask: What is it?

A grown man, dancing like a cheerleader tells a cheering room about Apple's next launch:

VERIFICATION? In Apple's video, what is the process by which claims about the superiority of the product are verified?

INDEPENDENCE? Is the person who shot, edited and posted the video from Apple's event independent of Apple? (No)

ACCOUNTABILITY? If something in the video is false, who do you contact to seek a correction?

(explain correct answer, referring to the taxonomy chart)

Is this VIAbLe...?



PC Magazine's Product Reviewer compares it to other smart watches.

Maybe it would help to look at another piece of information that came out about the same time.

Here's what a tech columnist at PC magazine wrote about the AppleWatch the day after it was unveiled.

(Read from it)

VERIFICATION? What is the process by which information on the product is verified? (reporting)

INDEPENDENCE? Is the person reviewing the product independent of Apple? (Works for PC mag, not manufacturer)

ACCOUNTABILITY? If something is false, who do you contact to seek a correction? (PC mag and the writer)

Is this VIAbLe...?



The New York Times reports on engineering challenges in smart watches

Here's yet another take on the hullabaloo surrounding the AppleWatch.

(Read from it)

VERIFICATION? What is the process by which information on the product is verified? (reporting)

INDEPENDENCE? Is the person reviewing the product independent of Apple? (Works for NYT, not manufacturer)

ACCOUNTABILITY? If something is false, who do you contact to seek a correction? (Farhad Majoo, the NYT reporter)

VIAble

Steering toward reliability



ANIMATION ALERT: the three lobes of VIA wipe in and out.

Back to the game

Ready?

Which neighborhood
are you in?



ANIMATION: CLICK 1= TIME AND VANITY FAIR COVERS GO AWAY. CLICK 2=THE REST OF THE ATLANTIC'S COVER, WITH SCIENTOLOGY ARTICLE

When you go to a news magazine like Time or Vanity Fair or The Atlantic, which neighborhood are you in?

(Don't let students off easy if they simply say mainstream outlets are reliable.

What makes them think that? Make them defend – or demolish – that assumption using VIA)



The Atlantic was founded in 1857 and has launched many leading writers' careers, publishing commentary on abolition, education, and other major issues. The Atlantic has won more National Magazine Awards than any other monthly magazine. So that sounds pretty reliable, doesn't it?

Let's look at this specific article about the Church of Scientology.

Although Scientology has come under close scrutiny for its treatment of staff and of church members in recent years, the article that appeared in The Atlantic in 2013 was decidedly upbeat:

"2012 was a milestone year for Scientology, with the religion expanding to more than 10,000 Churches, Missions and affiliated groups, spanning 167 nations — figures that represent a growth rate 20 times that of a decade ago."

Atlantic readers are used to a more skeptical tone and when they dug into the article, they discovered it wasn't a news report at all. The Atlantic was experimenting with something called "native advertising" which is paid for by an advertiser, but made to look like the regular contents of the paper, right down to the typefaces and layout style.

The blowback was immediate and within hours, the Atlantic had taken the fake news report down from its website. Hard to spot

But, again...News Literacy students might not have found it very reliable even before the controversy erupted. After all...**VIA**

Reading the article, it's hard to find evidence of a process of verification. Numbers are offered with no supporting information. Independence: It is obvious, almost from the start, that this is an all-positive view of the Church of Scientology, with no outside observers or critics giving an alternative view of the Church's recent actions. And finally...Who is accountable for it? There is no byline naming the reporter who is responsible for the facts. If it was written by the Church of Scientology's marketing staff, can they report unpleasant facts without losing their job?

A skeptical News Literacy student looking into it would only find the little

yellow box at the top: **Sponsor Content.**

Is this VIAbLe...?



In a reliable report, many sides of a controversy are heard from, facts are challenged and verified and a byline provides accountability for the work.

Here, by way of contrast, is a more typical report about the Scientology Church, with critics having their say and with the Church responding.

(Read from it)

VERIFICATION? INDEPENDENCE? ACCOUNTABILITY?

Can You Trust ABC's station in Los Angeles
To Give You the News?

KABC Allergies VNR.wmv

Let's watch the blood test story again.
Now what do you notice:

V.

I.

A.

(It's a two minute news segment on a blood test that can help diagnose allergies in children. What the station didn't tell its viewers was that the entire story was built from a video news release (VNR) funded by Quest Diagnostics. Don't spill this, lecturer. We'll come back to it)

Pivot Point

Every other row
Pivots to the row behind
To discuss in groups of four

We have done this informally in years past, but now provide a slide to prompt short in-class discussions among students.

At appropriate moments, the lecturer will pose a question to the room and then ask students to pivot into groups of 4, discuss the question and prepare to offer answers to the whole room.

This will be clumsy until students learn the drill, but the idea is to break up the lecture with small-group work, if only to give students a chance to shift positions.

On this pivot point, methodically analyze this item about the blood test...what neighborhood are you in?

Is this reliable information? We'll call on you for some answers.



ANIMATION: CLICK TO BRING IN VNR CHARACTERISTICS AND AD FOR THE BLOODTEST PRODUCT

Here's what's up: KABC-7 in Los Angeles aired that two-minute news segment on a blood test that can help diagnose allergies in children. What the station didn't tell its viewers was that the entire story was built from a video news release (VNR) funded by Quest Diagnostics, which runs thousands of lab centers across the United States where people go to have such tests done. The story mentions Quest and the Immunocaire test kit.

In adapting the story, producers at KABC-7 edited the VNR slightly for length and rearranged the order of clips and soundbites. To help disguise the VNR as a product of their station, KABC-7 swapped the male voice-over of the MutliVu publicist, using an un-identified female, and replaced all text and graphic displays with network-branded substitutes.

Here are the tells:

No reporter identification or sign-off.

The report does not provide any details about the doctor's affiliation or even his hometown.

No last name or hometown given for the patient and her mother

No explanation why the source was not identified.

No sources, written or human, other than the doctor.

Story as written will benefit a single product and company.

What Methods Make Journalism Different?

Verification

Independence

Accountability

(Mnemonic device: "Via")

What's the Mnemonic device that we use to distinguish journalism from other information?

Drill that into your skull. All three elements are the key to knowing whether information is reliable or not.

Your Homework: Define each neighborhood, using VIA

A Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods			
	Verification	Independence	Accountability
Advertising			
Promotion: Publicity			
Propaganda			
Entertainment			
News			
Raw information			

Between now and recitation, you are assigned to fill in the elements of this grid according to your understanding of the differences between these information neighborhoods.

Then in recitation, you'll turn it in ON PAPER and go through the chart with your classmates to cement these distinctions in your mind.

The Quick Quiz

1. Name at least three of the "information neighborhoods" described in lecture today.
2. What three overlapping traits define the neighborhood where reliable information is found?
3. Write a question we can answer to clarify today's lesson...or a comment that will help us improve our work.

Write your name and Recitation Instructor name on your Quiz

Hand your QUICK QUIZ to your recitation instructor as you leave, and practice saying her or his name. (i.e. "Hi, Professor Schmedlapp")

Every lecture, we'll stop and give you a quick quiz, just three questions.

This helps cement key lessons in your memory.

Plus, it helps us see if we explained things well.

And the third question is a chance for you to improve your own course.

We'll start lectures with a selection of your comments and suggestions.



hus endeth the Lesson...



We circle back now to the original question.

ASK:

Is Jon Stewart a journalist?

-What is journalism?

-What makes someone a journalist?

Here's what Jon Stewart himself says about it.



Moyers - Stewart.mov

We circle back now to the original question.

ASK:

Is Jon Stewart a journalist?

-What is journalism?

-What makes someone a journalist?

Here's what Jon Stewart himself says about it.

(at :30, he compares himself to a cartoonist)

A Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods

	Verification	Independence	Accountability
Advertising	Although false advertising is illegal, advertisers are given broad leeway to make one-sided claims without confirming or establishing truth.	The paying client controls the content and placement of an ad, to increase sales.	Ad writers and producers do not sign their work. Clients occasionally publish/air corrections.
Promotion/Publicity	PR and Publicity burnish a client's brand by product placement or event sponsorship or careful public statements. One-sided, it doesn't aim to confirm or establish truth.	The client pays staff to sponsor events, arrange product placement or make public statements to improve the client's image.	Publicists and PR staff rarely sign their work, but are sometimes required to correct errors publicly.
Propaganda	Effective propaganda mixes facts with illogical conclusions or exaggeration to demonize a cause, a person or a group of people.	A government or movement creates a one-sided or exaggerated message to demonize opponents or attract followers.	Propagandists do not sign their work and do not publicly correct errors.
Entertainment	Confirmation or verification is beside the point. Entertainment's first priority is to seize and hold an audience.	The producer controls the content and can therefore support any point of view.	Entertainment producers do sign their work. They do sometimes correct errors publicly.
News	Journalism is defined as a process of verification that aims to confirm or establish facts.	A code of ethics forbids journalists from joining or working for any interest group.	Journalists sign their work and are responsible for its accuracy. They correct errors publicly.
Raw information	Fresh, un-filtered, un-edited raw information is by definition unverified. It may confirm truth, it may obscure it.	Usually unknown. The person posting it may or may not have an agenda	Anonymous or not, the poster of raw information is not held accountable for how the information gets used.

Here, for reference, is the filled-in taxonomy