

# Can journalists express opinions?



Using VIA to analyze journalism that argues  
(And arguments that aren't journalism)



## VIAble?



Business reporter Rick Santelli, live from trading floor



## VIAble?



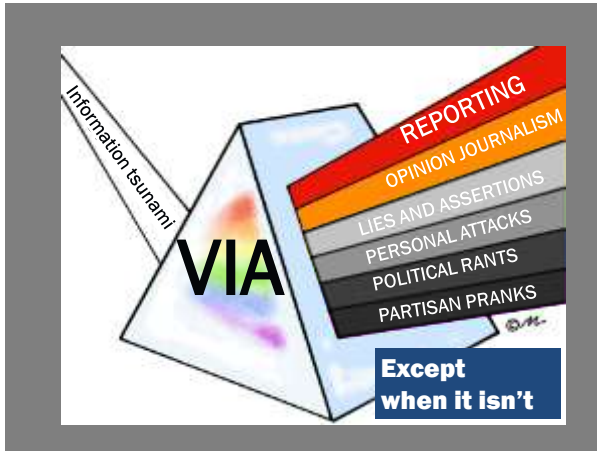
Business reporter Rick Santelli, live from trading floor



## Four questions

1. How do you tell the difference between straight **news reporting** and **opinion journalism**?
2. Why **should you care** which is which?
3. What is the value of **opinion journalism**?
4. How do you tell the difference between **opinion journalism** and mere **partisan assertion**?





### Last week's Quick Quiz

1. The News Drivers are: Importance, Prominence, Human interest, Conflict, Change, Proximity, Timeliness, Magnitude, Relevance.
2. Editorial judgment and the Audience also decide what's news

#### Your questions and comments ...

- ❖ Has there ever been a story that managed to hit all 10 news drivers?  
– Tom Wimmers
- ❖ Just because our brains pay more attention to the bad news, does this mean the news corporations aren't going to post as much good news? ... Bad news reflects negatively on a society or economy.  
– Rasheequr Rahman
- ❖ Do editors sometimes make a conscious effort to give the audience what it needs even if it may be unpopular?  
– Joseph Gallagher



### After this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Spot language and labels that distinguish reporting from opinion journalism.
2. Cite examples that illustrate the value of opinion journalism.
3. Understand differences between historical and modern opinion journalism.
4. Distinguish between opinion journalism and "mere assertion."

IN RECITATION THIS WEEK

## Test No. 1

10 questions  
80 minutes

Lectures 1-6

Short answers, NOT multiple choice  
Be prepared to use specific examples  
from the news in your answers

Opinion journalists go where  
reporters dare not tread



Journalism, opinion journalism  
and mere assertion:  
What's reliable and what is not

Everyone is entitled to  
his own opinion,  
but not his own facts.



Daniel Patrick Moynihan,  
former UN ambassador and  
four-term U.S. senator  
from New York

Journalism, opinion journalism  
and mere assertion:  
What's reliable and what is not



What is opinion doing in the  
Journalism neighborhood?



From SPJ's Code of Ethics:

- ✓ Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting.
- ✓ Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- ✓ Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- ✓ Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.

It's still about **VIA**



**VERIFICATION**

"Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context."

**INDEPENDENCE**

"Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests ... (and) remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility."

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

"Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context."

## Definition of **news**

Main Entry: **news** 🗣️  
 Pronunciation: \ˈnūz, ˈnyūz\  
 Function: *noun plural but singular in construction*  
 Usage: *often attributive*  
 Date: 15th century

Timely information about a subject of some public interest that is shared and subject to the journalistic process of **verification** by an **independent** organization that is **accountable**.

## Definition of **opinion**

Main Entry: **opinion** 🗣️  
 Pronunciation: ˈə-ˈpi-n-yən  
 Function: *noun*  
 Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French, from Latin *opinion-*, *opinio*, from *opinari*  
 Date: 14th century

Opinion is a view, a judgment, or an appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter.

## Definition of **assertion**

**assertion** 🗣️  
 1. The act of asserting.  
 2. Something declared or stated positively, often with no support or attempt at proof.

Something that is stated positively, often with no support or attempt at proof.

## **WARNING!**

News reports often include the opinions of experts, participants or witnesses.

That is not what we mean by “opinion journalism.”

This Is NOT opinion journalism:  
Quoting observers' opinions about events



A brief history of opinion journalism



Alexander Hamilton starts the New York Post and attacks Thomas Jefferson

Rise of the nonpartisan press

Mass-market publishing:  
Newspapers profit by attracting a wide variety  
of readers and advertisers



The opinion  
quarantine

Labeled editorializing





## The opinion quarantine



## Columns



## An opinion quarantine on TV?



## What happens when lines blur?



## An opinion niche



Is partisan cable TV news inheriting the role of Hamilton-era newsletters?

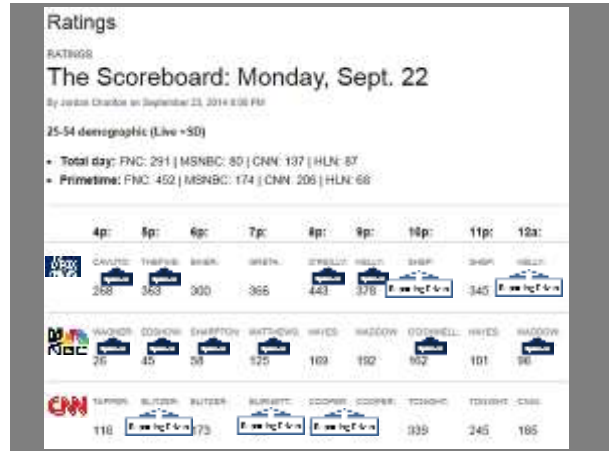


## Some journalists consider assertion-driven cable news shows unethical



### From the Code of Ethics:

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## WARNING!

## Independence ≠ Neutrality



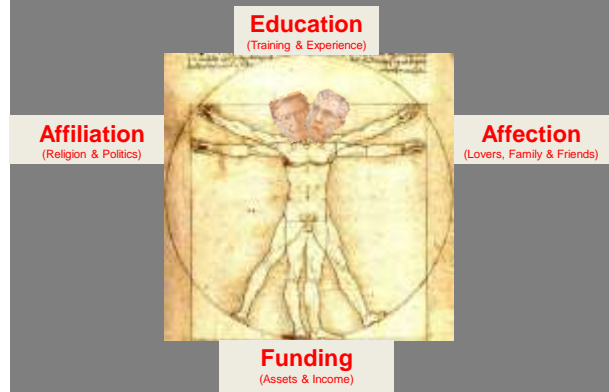
**PAUL KRUGMAN CRITICIZES OBAMA OVER NSA SCANDAL**



**Mitt Romney, the pretzel candidate**

By George F. Will, October 28, 2012

## Independence ≠ Neutrality



## “Think twice”

A silent minute  
to absorb  
the material



## Four questions

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2. Why should you care which is which?
3. What is the value of **opinion journalism**?
4. How do you tell the difference between **opinion journalism** and mere **partisan assertion**?

## Question 1

How do you tell the difference between **news reporting** and **opinion journalism**?





#### DIFFERENTIATING REPORTING FROM OPINION JOURNALISM

### The language of persuasion

- First-person declarations
- Exaggeration
- Emotionally loaded words
- Tone (sarcasm, irony)
- Parody's poison pen

#### THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION



### First-person declarations ("I ...")

Exploiting the Prophet

I think a few things are going on. The first is that many Muslim countries lack a tradition of free speech, and see ridicule of the prophet as part of a larger narrative of the West's invading or humiliating the Islamic world. People in these countries sometimes also have an addled view of how the United States handles blasphemy.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

### Tone: Sarcasm and irony



"Writing in the Harvard Crimson (newspaper) editorialist Sandra Korn wants to stop academic research and opinion contained in that research with which she disagrees. She just wants justice. And of course that justice would be imposed by Sandra Korn who apparently knows all...Harvard University is about as left wing as it gets."

## THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

### Exaggeration/ Superlatives



“Writing in the Harvard Crimson (newspaper) editorialist Sandra Korn wants to stop academic research and opinion contained in that research with which she disagrees. She just wants justice. And of course that justice would be imposed by Sandra Korn who apparently knows all...Harvard University is about as left wing as it gets.”

## THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

### Parody's poison pen

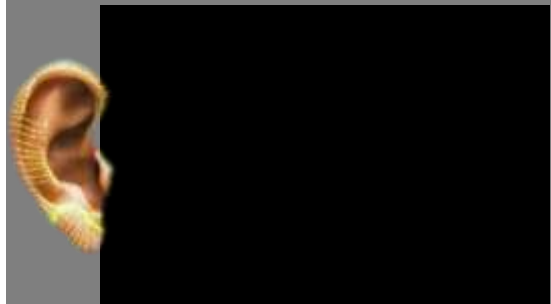


## DIFFERENTIATING REPORTING FROM OPINION JOURNALISM

### A live test



### From news to opinion



**DIFFERENTIATING REPORTING FROM OPINION JOURNALISM**

## Look for labels

- Editorial:
- Reporter's Notebook:
- Review:
- Op-Ed Contribution:
- News-Page Column:
- News Analysis:

The image shows two news broadcast screenshots. The left one features a man speaking with a red box overlay containing text. The right one shows a man in a suit with a red box overlay. Red arrows point from the labels above to these red boxes.

**DIFFERENTIATING REPORTING FROM OPINION JOURNALISM**

## Ethical newsrooms label opinion

The image shows the CNN World website interface. A red arrow points from the text above to a red box on the website, which is likely a label for an opinion piece.

**DIFFERENTIATING REPORTING FROM OPINION JOURNALISM**

## Ethical newsrooms label opinion

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## Ethical newsrooms label opinion

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DIFFERENTIATING REPORTING FROM OPINION JOURNALISM

Ethical newsrooms label opinion



FORMS OF OPINION JOURNALISM

The review



FORMS OF OPINION JOURNALISM

The editorial



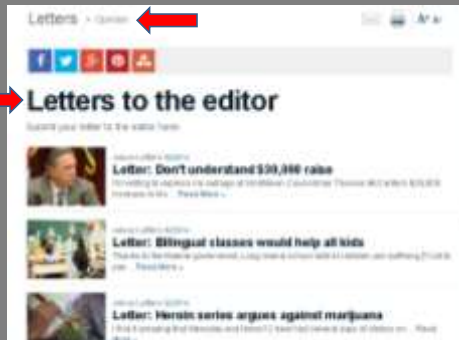
FORMS OF OPINION JOURNALISM

The column



## FORMS OF OPINION JOURNALISM

## The letter



## FORMS OF OPINION JOURNALISM

## The political cartoon



The visual equivalent of exaggeration, satire, irony and parody is caricature

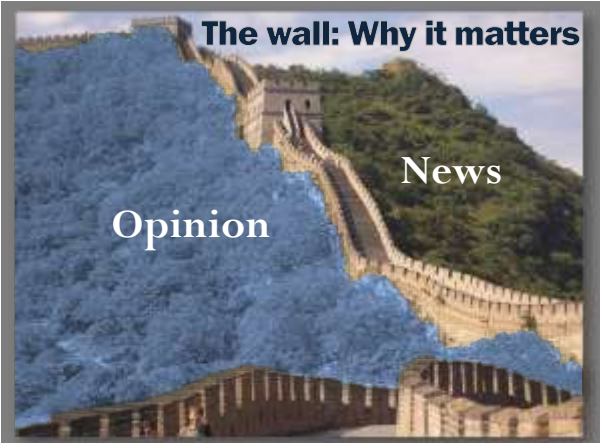
## Question 2

Why should you care  
which is which?

The goal of **news reporting** is to tell you what happened.

The goal of **opinion journalism** is to shape the way you view what happened – and what you do about it .

## The wall: Why it matters





## A virtual "wall" protects the credibility of neutral reporting



In print, online, a paper like the New York Times physically separates news coverage from opinion writing, AND those writers are also segregated in the building.

- WORKS
- U.S.
- POLITICS
- DOM. POL.
- INTERNATIONAL
- TECHNOLOGY
- SPORTS
- SCIENCE
- HEALTH
- ARTS
- STYLE
- OPINION

News Reporting

Opinion Journalism

**Boehner Halts Talks on Cuts, and House G.O.P. Cheers**  
 By David E. Bonior  
 President Barack Obama's budget plan is expected to be rejected by the House of Representatives on Tuesday.



**The White House**  
 The Obama administration made a powerful statement against the House's budget plan, but it strategically stopped a response.

## The separation of 'church' and 'state'



Newsday readers looked at the Shoreham nuclear power plant in two ways

## What happens when you cross the wall



Octavia Nasr fired by CNN over tweet praising late ayatollah  
 Internal memo said Twitter posts to Hezbollah's spiritual leader had compromised source reliability and editor's neutrality.

## President Obama Criticized For 'Latte Salute' While Stepping Off Marine One

The Washington Post | By Eli G. Lerner  
 Posted 08/22/2014 11:07 am EDT | Updated 08/22/2014 10:53 am EDT

Do news consumers see where news stops and opinion begins?



**Most Popular**

1. [Article Title]

2. [Article Title]

3. [Article Title]

4. [Article Title]

5. [Article Title]

6. [Article Title]

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98. [Article Title]

99. [Article Title]

100. [Article Title]

Most viewed,  
Most shared,  
Most tweeted

**Top 10 news websites**

1. Yahoo! News

2. The Huffington Post

3. CNN

4. Fox News

5. NBC News

6. The New York Times

7. The Washington Post

8. The Guardian

9. The Wall Street Journal

10. The Associated Press

Categories:

- Aggregates without distinction
- Aggregates without distinction
- MOSTLY OPINION
- REPORTING-DRIVEN
- REPORTING-DRIVEN
- REPORTING-DRIVEN
- REPORTING-DRIVEN
- REPORTING-DRIVEN
- REPORTING-DRIVEN
- REPORTING-DRIVEN

**Question 3**

**What is the value of opinion journalism?**

- Gives you new insights
- Challenges your assumptions
- Helps you make a decision or judgment
- American democracy's premise: An open contest among ideas is vital to democratic self-governance

**What is the value of opinion journalism?**

“The ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas ...”

– **Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes**  
Dissent in *Abrams v. 250 U.S. 616* (1919)

## Opinion journalism is valuable when . . .

- You are well-informed
- You are open-minded
- You are active, not passive



## Question 4

How do you tell apart opinion journalism and partisan assertion?



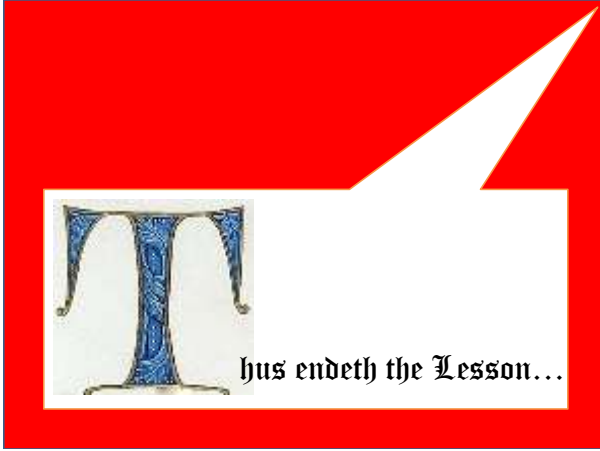
## Opinion journalism or mere assertion?



### The Quilck Quiz

1. What two kinds of clues help you distinguish opinion journalism from reporting?
2. What does Moynihan's Maxim say about fact and opinion?
3. Write a question we can answer to clarify today's lesson ... or a comment that will help us improve our work.

EMAIL OR HAND THE ANSWERS TO YOUR RECITATION INSTRUCTOR



	Bloviators	Opinion Journalists
Evidence	"I am America's truth detector...the all-knowing, all-sensing, all-everything Maha Rushie"	"Everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but not his own facts."
Logic	Practitioners accept fallacy-prone arguments: ad-hominem, appeals to authority, guilt by association	Practitioners attack fallacious arguments based on ad-hominem attacks, appeals to authority, guilt by association.
Audience	Audience is rarely outraged by practitioner's conclusions	Audience is often outraged by practitioner's conclusions.

# Opinion Journalism or Mere Assertion?



Moyers\_Inequality.mov

# Opinion Journalism or Mere Assertion?

UncleRush.wmv

<p><b>Deriving the antecedent</b></p> <p>If it is legal, no one will publish it. It is legal. Therefore someone will publish it.</p> <p>What other reasons might explain why someone has published it?</p>	<p><b>Affirmation of the consequent</b></p> <p>If it is legal, no one will publish it. No one has published it. Therefore it is not legal.</p> <p>What other reasons might explain why no one has published it?</p>	<p><b>Distinction of material</b></p> <p>According to President Obama's own words, the problem will disappear if "value jumps" for small businesses.</p> <p>Why is only a very small part of what President Obama has proposed?</p>	<p><b>Reason for the condition</b></p> <p>Profiting makes sense. Super, then they would not be profitable. That is why we cannot publish books.</p> <p>Why is publishing books prohibited and illegal for copyright?</p>
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## The Logic (and Illogic) of Persuasion

<p><b>Existential fallacy</b></p> <p>All corporations are hard to verify. Therefore, some news stories that are hard to verify are corporations.</p> <p>What other reasons might make it difficult to verify a news story?</p>	<p><b>The "fallacy" fallacy</b></p> <p>Who doesn't publish it, it is illegal. It is not illegal. Therefore he should publish it.</p> <p>Why is sharing a truly argument not a reason for its persuasiveness?</p>	<p><b>Straw-man argument</b></p> <p>We miss some business during war, otherwise we will be fully prepared to release from that situation.</p> <p>How does this exaggerated position affect the war effort or battle?</p>	<p><b>Red herring</b></p> <p>If it is okay to censor some news, then probably governments will be worried about censorship of news.</p> <p>Why does a first great step inevitably lead to a significant consequence?</p>
<p><b>Clearer effort</b></p> <p>I remember hearing Joe (name) talk the Democrats will never be elected. (I forgot that I heard that in a TV ad.)</p> <p>Why are people more likely to recall the message and forget the person?</p>	<p><b>Principle of structure</b></p> <p>I think Democrats help the poor. Democrats voted to fund Welfare. Welfare must be bad for the poor.</p> <p>Why is it unlikely for us to hold two contradictory beliefs simultaneously?</p>	<p><b>Ad hominem</b></p> <p>We cannot publish some documents. I am opposed to it. It is illegal. Therefore it must be illegal.</p> <p>Why would we base the advice of experts without expert evidence?</p>	<p><b>Redundant fallacy</b></p> <p>No other newspapers published it. Therefore we concluded that it must not be worth publishing.</p> <p>Why would popularity be a good reason to publish or not to publish?</p>
<p><b>Cognitive Biases</b></p> <p><b>Framing</b></p> <p>I am not in favor of tax increases. But the Democrats will never be elected. (I forgot that I heard that in a TV ad.)</p> <p>Why do we draw different conclusions based on how something is presented?</p>	<p><b>Cognitive Biases</b></p> <p>I am certain that Republicans would make America and their children Welfare. I found a person that supports it.</p> <p>Why do we have a tendency to base our conclusions on what we hear?</p>	<p><b>Red Herrings</b></p> <p><b>Guilt by association</b></p> <p>We would raise tax. Republicans would be in a position to do it. A lot of Republicans are rich.</p> <p>Why would a person's membership affect the results of their government?</p>	<p><b>Ad hominem</b></p> <p>No one should support the tax plan presented by the government. After all, he is a member of tax fraud.</p> <p>Why should a personal attack replace the arguments for the proposal?</p>

### Top 10 Blogs

	<b>1. iH</b>	<b>MOSTLY OPINION</b>
	<b>2. TheAZ</b>	<b>REPORTING-DRIVEN</b>
	<b>3. Business Insider</b>	<b>REPORTING-DRIVEN</b>
	<b>4. Mashable</b>	
	<b>5. GIZMODO</b>	
	<b>6. 5DAYS</b>	
	<b>7. Money</b>	<b>MOSTLY OPINION</b>
	<b>8. The New York Times</b>	
	<b>9. TC</b>	<b>REPORTING-DRIVEN</b>
	<b>10. PAPER</b>	

