

A journalist's first obligation is to the

TRUTH

What is True and How Do You Know?



Did he get all the way up there with no rope?

Truth and Consequences



Truth and Consequences



Three Big Questions today:

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



Last week's Quick Quiz

1. The two elements of a photo that indicate accountability and verification are the Caption and the Credit.
2. Two reasons photos are such an important part of news coverage: They provide direct evidence, the audience is powerfully drawn to them, viewers believe text more if it is accompanied with a photo.

Your questions and Comments ...

- ❖ Do tools exist to doctor videos like still photos? – Khalid Hussein
- ❖ Why are PhotoShop illustrations even allowed? – Breanna Irizarry
- ❖ Can't pictures of people dying and bloody images be considered obscene? – Joanna MacMahon
- ❖ How much time do news outlets spend on verifying images? – Kunal Kohli

After this lecture, students will be able to:

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

These skills relate to course outcomes 1 & 4

EXTRA CREDIT

If you had to work...or study...
You can still earn extra credit for My
Life As.

Watch the event on YouTube and
answer 5 simple questions.

See your recitation
Instructor for details



Shattered Glass Viewings:
Available on Blackboard, on Netflix, and online.



Glasstrailer.wmv

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



The process of JUSTIFYING a truth claim with EVIDENCE is **VERIFICATION**

Partial Evidence, Different “Truths”



When can we be satisfied that we have enough evidence?

What Is Truth?



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

What Is Truth?



“Truthiness”*
-Stephen Colbert

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

Truthiness.wmv

What Is “Journalistic Truth?”



“...the best obtainable version of the truth.”

Bob Woodward
at Stony Brook University
October 16, 2014



What Is “Journalism?”

What Do Journalists Mean By Truth?



**Code of Ethics Polestar #1
Seek Truth and Report It (i.e. NOW)***

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

Journalism and Science



Like scientists, journalists strive for a pragmatic truth, that helps explain the world and helps you function day-to-day

Journalism and Science 3. Collect, Sort & Analyze Observations



But...Real World Does Not Permit Controlled Lab Conditions (Journalism is more like “field work”)

Journalism and Science 2. Shared Ethic of Peer Review



Expert Peer Reviewers
vs.
Editors and Competitors

Scientific Truth

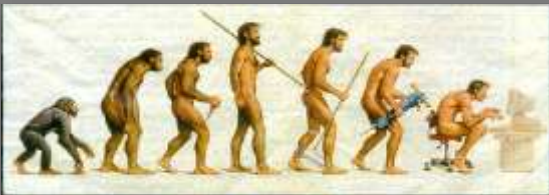
A.K.A **Theory**



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

Journalism and Science

1. Shared Pragmatic Definition



Like scientists, Journalists do not believe in absolute truth. What we call "truth" changes as evidence accumulates.

Journalistic Truth is *Provisional*

pro·vi·sion·al

/pra'viZHən/ ⓘ

Adjective

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

Noun

A provisional postage stamp.

Synonyms

temporary - interim - provisory - tentative - temporal

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

Truth is Provisional

Pluto Is Demoted to 'Dwarf Planet'



We Extend the Frontiers of Knowledge

Truth is Provisional



Newsday,
Sept. 15, 2009

Newsday, Sept. 16, 2009



Newsday, Sept. 18, 2009



Newsday, Sept. 17, 2009



The Hofstra Rape Case

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



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

**Follow
the Story
Over Time**

The Burden is on You

“Think Twice”

A Silent Minute to Absorb the Material

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The Discipline of Verification

- ✓ Gather, Assess, and Weigh Evidence
- ✓ Place Evidence In The Big Picture (Context)
- ✓ Explain How They Know...(and What They Don't Know)*

*This is called "Transparency."

Seeking Truth

When Searching for the Truth
Not All Evidence is Equal

Direct Evidence



Indirect Evidence



PIVOT POINT: Was It D.U.I.?



THINK ABOUT A TRAFFIC ACCIDENT...

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

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

Seeking Truth

Journalistic Verification Using Direct Evidence

The Natural Hierarchy:

1. Video, Audio, Photos
2. Documents, Records, "the Paper Trail"
3. Journalist Eyewitness Account
4. Observer Eyewitness Account

Verification Using Direct Evidence

1. Video, Audio, Photos



Direct Evidence

Climber.wmv

Verification Using Direct Evidence

2. Documents, Records “The Paper Trail”



“Birtherism” folds in the face of documentary evidence

Verification Using Direct Evidence

3. Journalist Eyewitness Account



Ward1.wmv

GREENPOINT FIRE.MP4

Verification Using Direct Evidence
Missing From This Fire Story Is...?

4. Observer Eyewitness Accounts:



Seeking Truth:

Journalistic Verification Using Indirect Evidence:

The Hierarchy Isn't As Naturally Clear
(Hence, no numbered list)

- ✓ Accounts from Official spokespersons
(i.e. Lawyer, Press Secretary, Written Press Release)
- ✓ Expert reconstructions
- ✓ Hearsay Testimony (Second-Hand or more)
- ✓ Computer models
- ✓ Inferences From Evidence

Verification Using Indirect Evidence:
 ✓ Accounts from Official Spokespersons

"White House Spokesperson Josh Earnest said..."

Verification Using Indirect Evidence:
 ✓ Accounts from Official Spokespersons

"

Verification Using Indirect Evidence:
 ✓ Accounts from official spokespersons

WATCH OUT!

"C.J. Karamargin, an aide to Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords..."

Verification Using Indirect Evidence:
 ✓ Expert Reconstructions

Former NYC medical examiner finds "no evidence of struggle" between Michael Brown and officer who shot him

Verification Using Indirect Evidence: ✓ Expert Reconstructions



Aviation experts, using data provided by government and Malaysian Airline officials, created predictive models of flight MH370's possible whereabouts.

Verification Using Indirect Evidence ✓ Hearsay or 2nd-Hand Witnesses

"My daughter saw him run in the house and then she heard a woman scream. He must'a killed his wife."



Verification Using Indirect Evidence ✓ Hearsay or 2nd-Hand Witnesses

Hoboken Mayor Is Said to Have Told of Threat

By David Mervin, Staff Writer
Published: 11/11/13 11:58 AM EST
Updated: 11/11/13 12:01 PM EST
The assistant to the mayor, David Zimmer, said he had been upset to hear about what he called "this quid pro quo ultimatum by the lieutenant governor."

The aides said she had told them about the threat by Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, shortly after it occurred, according to two people briefed on the matter.

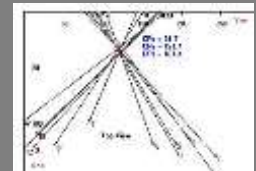
A Hoboken city councilman, David Nello, said in an interview that Ms. Zimmer had also told him about the threat by Ms. Guadagno, a Republican. Mr. Nello, a Democrat, said he had been upset to hear about what he called "this quid pro quo ultimatum by the lieutenant governor."

Verification Using Indirect Evidence

✓ Computer models and Substitutions

Blood-spatter analyst supports Spector's story

Expert says Spector didn't have to be within arm's length of Clapton



Verification Using Indirect Evidence ✓ Inferences

Sugary drinks tied to obesity among preschoolers

Mon, Aug 5, 2013

By Geneva Pittman

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

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



How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Hierarchy of Evidence: Wreck Scene

Direct Evidence:

- Driver of Car
- Eyewitnesses
- Breathalyzer Report
- Driving Records
- Accident Reports for the Road



Indirect Evidence:

- Campus Police
- University Officials
- Lawyer for Driver
- Friends and Relatives of Victims
- Family of Driver
- Students on Campus

Seeking Truth, Analyze Evidence

Where does the evidence come from?

The source of that evidence determines the weight you give it.

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

How Do You Know What's True?

1. Consider all the evidence together.
2. Note which evidence is direct, which is indirect.
3. Note if relevant evidence is missing.
4. Note irrelevant evidence that's in the way.
5. If evidence is contradictory, weigh its origins. Is it direct? What is the source of it? Ask critical questions and assign relative weight to each piece of evidence.
6. Remember Journalistic truth is the best approximation of truth at this time. It will change as new evidence accumulates. But to avoid paralysis, we make conclusions each day, based on skillful analysis of the evidence provided to us.



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Key Lesson for the News Consumer

AJR American Journalism Review **THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB** MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

Katrina From AJR, December/January 2006

Myth-Making in New Orleans

The aggressive media coverage of Hurricane Katrina was marred by the widespread reporting—sometimes attributed to public officials—of murders and rapes that apparently never took place. What can news outlets learn from this episode to prevent similar problems in the future?

By Brian Throssel
Brian Throssel is a reporter at New Orleans' Times-Picayune, and he can be reached at BrianThrossel@timespicayune.com.

As I walked briskly through the dimly lit area inside the food service entrance of New Orleans' Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the thought of pulling back the sheets covering the

Reasons Verification Process Fails

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

Why Verification Breaks Down

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

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

Why Verification Breaks Down

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



Why Verification Breaks Down

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

CNN.BOSTON.FLUB.WMV

Getting Ready for the Next Boston...



Onthemedias.org

Remember Truth is Provisional
And Not All Evidence Deserves Equal Weight

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. It misstated the date that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed as April 4, 1968, not April 30. Mr. Cronkite covered the D-Day invasion of Normandy in 1944, not from the beaches. In addition, Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, not July 26. The 1969 Evening News' overtook "The Horizon," not after the 1969-70 television season, not after the 1969-70 season. A communications satellite used to relay correspondents' reports from around the world was Telstar, not Teletar. Mr. Cronkite was not one of the first reporters from the field after he left CBS before Mr. Cronkite was the anchor of the 1960s; he left CBS before Mr. Cronkite was the anchor. The appraisal also misstated the name of the news agency error; the agency was the Associated Press, not the United Press. Mr. Cronkite was Moscow bureau chief after World War II. At that time it was United Press, not United Press International.

Why Verification Breaks Down



✓ Journalists Are Given the Wrong Information

Why Verification Breaks Down

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



Why Verification Breaks Down

✓Correlation is analyzed as causation...Misuse of Evidence



Why Verification Breaks Down

✓ Because of political and/or physical barriers, verification (the search for evidence) is simply **difficult**

Obama admits some press from fleeing BP oil spill areas in the Gulf

Journalist interviews sickened Fukushima author: 8 teeth lost
– Nails fell out – Going bald (VIDEO)

Reporters barred from meeting on faulty 9-1-1 system
Plans to fix the troubled system and the status of a citizen representative were expected to be discussed behind closed doors
BY JIM REDDEN

Journalist as eyewitness:

Katrina's body count could reach 10,000



Always ask:
Did the Reporter
Open the Freezer?

What if You Demand Verification?



Code of Ethics

Society of News-Literate Citizens

1. Ask: Did the Reporter Open the Freezer?
2. Truth is Provisional, So Follow The Story



Thus endeth the Lesson...