

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY School of Journalism • News Literacy "News Literacy and Why It's Important"

Truth and Verification

What is Journalism's First Obligation?

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth



Newsweek

Newsweek's Quran Report Leads to 17 Deaths, then is retracted because of faulty Information

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Consequences of a failure to verify

Newsweek

How a Fire Broke Out

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

By Evan Thomas
NEWSWEEK

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

Newsweek's Quran Reports Leads to 17 Deaths

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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?*

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News Matters



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News Matters

Finding reliable information to make your choices

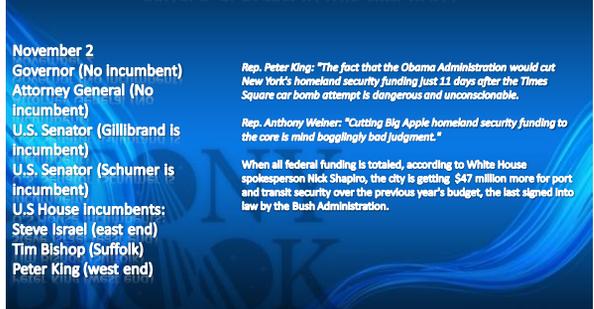
What's at stake in this election?

November 2
 Governor (No Incumbent)
 Attorney General (No Incumbent)
 U.S. Senator (Gillibrand Is Incumbent)
 U.S. Senator (Schumer Is Incumbent)
 U.S House Incumbents:
 Steve Israel (east end)
 Tim Bishop (Suffolk)
 Peter King (west end)

Rep. Peter King: "The fact that the Obama Administration would cut New York's homeland security funding just 11 days after the Times Square car bomb attempt is dangerous and unconscionable."

Rep. Anthony Weiner: "Cutting Big Apple homeland security funding to the core is mind bogglingly bad judgment."

When all federal funding is totaled, according to White House spokesperson Nick Shapiro, the city is getting \$47 million more for port and transit security over the previous year's budget, the last signed into law by the Bush Administration.



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News Matters

Finding reliable information to make your choices

What's at stake in this election?




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What's at stake in this election?

Cuomo.wmv



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News Matters

Finding reliable information to make your choices
What's at stake in this election?



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News Matters

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What's at stake in this election?

Paladino.wmv

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Arianna Huffington

Founder, The Huffington Post
Staller Center, October 25, 8 p.m.
Extra Credit will be granted

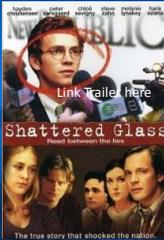



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Shattered Glass Viewings:

Screenings in Javits 110
Wed. 20th 6:50 p.m.;
Thursday 21st 7:45 a.m.;
Monday 25th 7 p.m.

You will write this up after lecture #9



[Link trailer here](#)

The true story that shocked the nation.

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Information: Power to Save Lives?



Tyler Clement, 18
Rutgers Student
Suicide of GW Bridge
9/22/2010

Raymond Chase, 19
Johnson and Wales
College,
Suicide by hanging
9/29/2010

Asher Brown, 13
Houston, TX
Suicide by gun
9/23/2010

Billy Lucas, 15
Greensburg, IN
Suicide by
hanging
9/9/2010

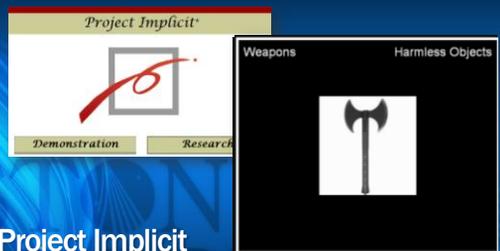
Seth Walsh, 13
Tehachapi, CA
Suicide by
hanging
9/19/2010

Counseling and Psychological Services at 631-632-6720
Center for Prevention and Outreach at 631-632-2748.

Resources:
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force - <http://www.thetaskforce.org>
Human Rights Campaign - <http://www.hrc.org/>
PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays -
<http://community.pflag.org/>
PFLAG Long Island - <http://www.pflagill.org/>
Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth - <http://lkgaly.org/>

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What are your biases?



Project Implicit

Project Implicit

Weapons Harmless Objects

Demonstration Research

Project Implicit

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Another Take on 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"

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Start Thinking About The Essay Due @ Your Last Recitation

Your final essay will be written after a semester-long pursuit of reliable information on a single topic or question currently in the news that interests you. You will be expected to engage with multiple news sources, and employ the News Literacy tools and principles we study in class to reach a conclusion, make a judgment or take an action on the topic you have selected.

What kind of questions can you pursue? Here are a few examples.

- "What impact would I have if I boycotted BP gas stations in protest of the spill in the Gulf?"
- "Has President Obama's stimulus plan accomplished more harm than good?"
- "Is there a candidate for governor with a public record that resembles my views on issues that matter to me?"
- "Is it safe to eat seafood from the Gulf Coast? Does the U.S. FDA adequately protect consumers from unsafe food?"
- "Will the proposed cultural center near Ground Zero encourage or discourage terrorism?"
- "Should the government regulate stem cell research? If so, to what extent?"
- "Does Facebook do a sufficient job of protecting users' privacy?"

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Truth and Verification

What is Journalism's First Obligation?

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Truth and Verification

Journalism's First Obligation Is to the Truth

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What Is Truth?



What Do Journalists Mean By 'Truth'?

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What Is Truth?



'A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to put its pants on.'

Not Winston Churchill
Not Mark Twain
Possibly an obscure Baptist Preacher's sermon on April 1, 1855

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What Is Truth?

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

-Mark Twain



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What Is Truth?

'What I tell you three times is true.'

-Lewis Carroll



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What Is Truth?



THE WORD
Truthiness

'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

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Truthiness.wmv

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Truth and Verification

"The desire that information be truthful is elemental. Since news is the material that people use to think about the world beyond themselves, the most important quality is that it be usable and reliable."

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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?

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The Truth Debate



Video on Blackboard: See assignment folder

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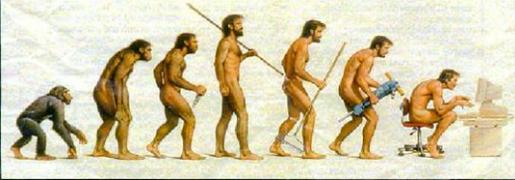
Scientific Truth



Scientific truth is a matter of proportionality. It will ever time as ice changes.

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Journalism and Science



Like scientists, journalists do not believe in absolute truth. Truth is *provisional*. It changes over time.

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Journalism and Science



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

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Journalism and Science



Like science, journalism employs a system of peer review.

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Journalism and Science



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

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Truth is Provisional

Newsday, Sept. 15, 2009

4 held in rape of Hofstra student

Newsday, Sept. 16, 2009

THE HOFSTRA CASE
Why Her Story Changed
And why that doesn't change everything

HOFSTRA RAPE CASE
DA: She Made It Up
Student admits she consented to encounter, officials say

Fear And Anger On Campus

The Hofstra Rape Case

Newsday, Sept. 17, 2009

Newsday, Sept. 18, 2009

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How Big Was That Gulf Oil Leak?

BP falls short in estimate of oil spill rate
Crews now capturing 5,000 barrels a day, the supposed size of the leak

Up to 40,000-plus barrels per day pouring into Gulf: US

BP oil leak likely far less than 100,000 bpd

BP oil spill estimates double
US government figures show twice as much oil spewing into the Gulf of Mexico that earlier estimators suggested

Q&A: Why estimates of the BP oil spill keep changing

Numbers of Gulf oil spill flow keep looking worse as US revises them up for third time

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First Drafts of History: The Death of a Hostage

Linda Norgrove, a British USAID worker in Afghanistan, was tragically killed by an explosion on Friday night. She had been kidnapped on Sept. 26. NATO forces were involved in an attempt to rescue Norgrove when her captor reportedly detonated the fatal explosive, killing her and himself. NATO officials assure that they did everything in their power to rescue Norgrove. British Foreign Secretary William Hague asserting that responsibility for this tragedy lies completely with those who took her hostage.

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First Drafts of History: The Death of a Hostage

Rescue operations such as the failed attempt to free a British aid worker who was killed in Afghanistan last week are among the "trickiest military operations that can ever be conducted", a former Army commander of British forces in the country has said.

Linda Norgrove died after her rebel captors detonated a bomb vest as American troops attempted to rescue her.

Originaly from *Saturday Night Live* in the *Saturday Night Live* sketch "The British Aid Worker Who Was Killed in Afghanistan" (2009).

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First Drafts of History: The Death of a Hostage



Aerial grenade possibly killed hostage Source: CNN

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First Drafts of History: The Death of a Hostage

HOSTAGE.WMV

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Truth is Provisional

Mozart may have died of strep throat complications



The portrait by painter Johann Baptist Stuppach showed Mozart not long before his mysterious death in 1791.



Study Concludes Beethoven Died From Lead Poisoning

It Changes Over Time

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Truth is Provisional



Journalists Are Given the Wrong Information

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Truth is Provisional

Pluto Is Demoted to 'Dwarf Planet'



We Extend the Frontiers of Knowledge

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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.

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Implications

For Journalists



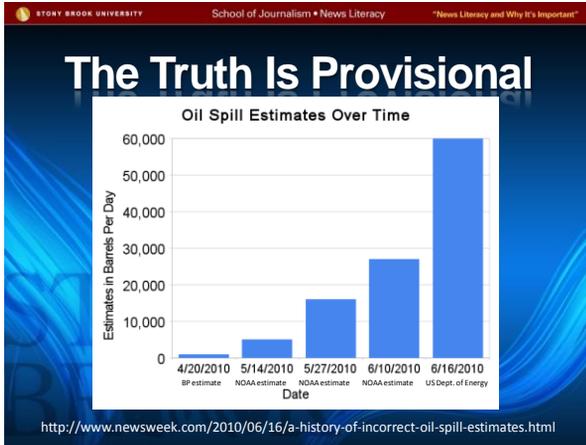
For News Consumers



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The Lesson for the News Consumer

Follow the Story Over Time



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How Journalists Pursue the Truth The Verification Process

A process that takes *newsworthy information* and checks its credibility and reliability before it is published or broadcast as *news*.

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Seeking Truth The Journalist's Discipline of Verification

- Gather, Assess, and Weigh Evidence
- Add Meaning to Facts Through Context
- As Appropriate, Adjust Balance or Fairness
- Explain How They Know...(and What They Don't Know)*

*This is called "Transparency."

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Financial Oracle Suze Orman



Why News Consumers Must Weigh Evidence

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Seeking Truth

When Gathering and Weighing, Not All Evidence is Equal

Direct Evidence



Indirect Evidence



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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Direct Evidence

- Eyewitnesses
- Documents and Records
- Photographs and Videos

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Eyewitness Verifies Sequence of Events



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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Documents & Records Verify Neglect in Madoff case

The World's Largest Hedge Fund is a Fraud

November 7, 2005 Submission to the SEC
Madoff Investment Securities, LLC
www.madoff.com

Opening Remarks:

I am the original source for the information presented herein having first presented my rationale, both verbally and in writing, to the SEC's Boston office in May, 1999 before any public information doubting Madoff Investment Securities, LLC appeared in the press. There was no whistleblower or insider involved in compiling this report. I used the Modigliani-Myer Theory to assemble my set of observations. My observations were collected first-hand by listening to fund of fund investors talk about their investments in a hedge fund run by Madoff Investment Securities, LLC, a SEC registered firm. I have also spoken to the heads of various Wall Street equity derivative trading desks and every single one of the senior managers I spoke with told me that Bernie Madoff was a fraud. Of course, no one wants to take undue career risk by sticking their head up and saying the emperor isn't wearing any clothes but...

I am a derivatives expert and have traded or assisted in the trading of several billion \$US in options strategies for hedge funds and institutional clients. I have experience managing equity-linked conversion products both using index options and using individual stock options, both with and without index puts. Very few people in the world have the mathematical background needed to manage these types of products but I am one of them. I have outlined a detailed set of Red Flags that make me very suspicious that Bernie Madoff's returns aren't real and, if they are real, then they would almost certainly have to be generated by front-running customer order flow from the broker-dealer arm of Madoff Investment Securities, LLC.

largest Ponzi scheme ever up to no good

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Photographic evidence

MailOnline

Home U.S. News World U.S. & Canada Personal Health Entertainment

'Ha ha, I hit 'em': Top secret video showing U.S. helicopter pilots gunning down 12 civilians in Baghdad attack leaked online

By [Name] on [Date]

U.S. military officials in a video leaked online showed soldiers in a helicopter gunning down 12 civilians in Baghdad during a 2003 attack. The video, which was leaked to the Internet, shows the helicopter firing its machine guns at a crowd of people. The video was obtained by a source who provided it to the author.

Price: \$138

Buy Now

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Photos or Video

helliattack.wmv

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Photos or Video

TIGERS

BAD CALL RUINS PERFECT GAME
 UMP APOLOGIZES TO PITCHER

abc NEWS .com

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Photos or Video

badcall.wmv

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth Indirect Evidence

For example...

- Second and Third-hand accounts
"White House Spokesperson Robert Gibbs"
- Police Commissioners (relaying officer info)
- Investigators (citing other people's findings & statements)
- Reconstruction/Recreation (i.e. confirming it's possible)

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How Journalists Pursue the Truth Indirect Evidence

Police: 4 dead in shooting at West Seattle house

Marnel Vadas Associated Press

Topic: West Seattle shooting



SEATTLE — Police found four people fatally shot in a Seattle home today after neighbors reported gunfire and a wounded woman ran into the front yard yelling officers, "My mom's gone crazy."

Neighbors look on at the scene of a shooting that left four people dead and another wounded Thursday, Sept. 23, 2010, in West Seattle. Police believe the woman suspected of firing the shots at the home is among the dead. (File-style photo)

Officers responded to a report of gunshots at about 1:30 p.m. and could still hear shots being fired from the house when they arrived, police spokesman Sean Whitcomb said.

Police said that while they were arriving, a man in his 50s ran into the house. Two more shots were fired and he ran back out, telling officers his wife had shot herself.

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Four Big Questions today:

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Why the Verification Process Breaks Down

The Times-Picayune
New Orleans

September 6, 2005

Katrina's body count could reach 10,000
Bodies found piled in freezer at Convention Center

By Brian Thevenot
Staff writer

Arkansas National Guardsman Mikel Brooks stepped through the food service entrance of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center Monday, flipped on the light at the end of his machine gun, and started pointing out bodies.

"Don't step in that blood - it's contaminated," he said. "That one with his arm sticking up in the air, he's an old man."

Then he shined the light on the smaller human figure under the white sheet next to the elderly man.

"That's a kid," he said. "There's another one in the freezer, a 7-year-old with her throat cut."

He moved on, walking quickly through the darkness, pulling his camouflage shirt

The New Orleans Times-Picayune's Inaccurate Report

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Lesson #3 for the News Consumer

Always ask:
Did the Reporter Open the Freezer?

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Four Big Questions today:

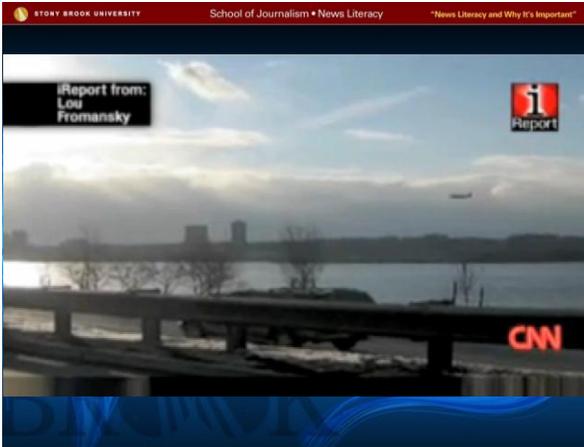
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Seeking Truth in The Real World

A Mix of Direct, Indirect Evidence

Count the different types of evidence



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Pursuing Reliable Information

- 1) *What IS truth?*
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How Journalists Pursue the Truth

Anatomy of a Car Accident

Direct Evidence:

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

Drunk Driver to Blame for Deadly Crash

Indirect Evidence:

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

Obama Pleads more funding for college loans

LADY GAGA COMES TO STONY BROOK!

Stony Brook FINALLY in NCAA Tournament!

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A Big Day: Two Key Lessons

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

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Assignments:

For Recitation: Read "Journalism of Verification" chapter: in digital textbook

Read, print, bring to recitation the Sean Bell shooting story.

Paper due, "The Secret Sponsors"

For Next Lecture: News Log 3

For Students in Professors Miller and Schneider's Lectures, check Blackboard to see if your instructor assigned the "Opposing Viewpoints" paper.