

News vs. Opinion

What You're Doing

We are providing you with a news story that ran in the Wall Street Journal and an opinion column by Nicholas D. Kristof of the New York Times. Read all the required readings before completing the writing portion of this assignment.

Both pieces look at the same topic: The embattled leader of Libya and the use of violence against his own people. The two pieces were published one day apart.

Read both pieces carefully. Pay attention to visual presentation, labels for the article, opinion in the headline, word choice in the body of the text, tone and overall content. For each piece, list and explain 10 clues in each article that tell you as a reader that you are digesting either a straight news story or an opinion. Your completed assignment should have two lists with an overall total of 20 examples.

It is crucial that you explain each example. Do not merely cut and paste random quotes from the articles. Be specific. Use details. If you quote a source, you must identify him or her by first and last name as well as title, if one exists.

Why You're Doing This

We've discussed in class how difficult it can be to tell the difference between opinion journalism and straight news coverage, and why it's important to be able to do so. This assignment will not only assist you in following the news, a basic requirement of this course, but will also give you some practice at identifying the defining features of news and opinion within the context of a single news event. In doing so, this assignment will allow you to evaluate how and why each offers the consumer a distinct experience.

What You Should Aim to Get Out of It

This assignment should help you to get more value from news or opinion pieces, to better understand their respective roles, and to critically analyze how well each complies with the applicable journalistic standards. You should end up being better prepared to tell whether you're getting useful, credible information on which you can base important decisions.