

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

What is True and How Do You Know?



Did he get all the way up with no rope?

Truth and Consequences

A collage of news headlines and a Newsweek article snippet. The top left shows a headline "KRUGMAN FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY" with a small image of a man. To its right is a headline "Police Identify Gunman in Deadly Connecticut Elementary School Shooting (UPDATE)". Below these is a Newsweek article snippet titled "How a Fire Broke Out" with a sub-headline "The story of a sensitive NEWSWEEK report about alleged abuses at Guantanamo Bay and a surge of deadly unrest in the Islamic world." The snippet includes the byline "By Kate Thomson" and the date "MAY 11 issue". The text of the snippet discusses the May 11 issue, the end of the week, the story had spread from Afghanistan throughout much of the Muslim world, from China to Indonesia, and mentions the "How a Fire Broke Out" report.

Four Big Questions:

- 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?*



Housekeeping, Announcements & Notes

Last Week's Lesson: 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..."

-Michael Shermer, author
"Why People Believe Weird Things"

What if you make it a habit to challenge yourself with uncomfortable facts?

News Matters!

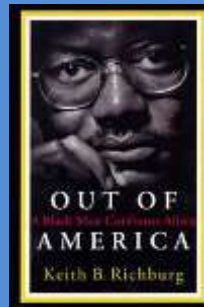
Which Matters Made News on Your Homepage TODAY?

And

What Course Concepts Were on Display This Week?

Extra Credit Event #3

May 1: The Power of Social Media in China



Keith Richburg

Veteran bureau chief for The Washington Post: 20 years in Beijing, Paris, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Nairobi and Manila and New York.

SAC Auditorium, 8 p.m., Tickets not required, but early arrival is. Doors open at 7:45

Shattered Glass

View it through:

- Netflix,
- Online (see Blackboard™ link)
- Melville Library (copies on hand)



Code of Ethics

1. Seek Truth and Report It
2. Minimize Harm
3. Act Independently
4. Be Accountable

A journalist's first obligation is to the



Four Big Questions today:

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- 2) *How does the verification process work?*
- 3) *Why does it break down?*
- 4) *What kinds of evidence should a news consumer look for?*

What Is Truth?



What Do Journalists Mean By 'Truth'?

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

“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 Do Journalists Mean By Truth?



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....”

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



Newsday,
Sept. 15, 2009

Newsday, Sept. 16, 2009



Newsday, Sept. 18, 2009



Newsday, Sept. 17, 2009



The Hofstra Rape Case

This was not a case of Provisional Truth

Manti Te'o Overcomes Tragic Loss of Grandma and Girlfriend

132 days ago by Pierre Jacob



Notre Dame, Te'o say linebacker was victim of hoax

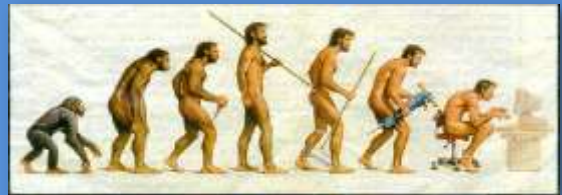
By Eye on College Football staff
January 16, 2012 4:27 pm ET

Scientific Theory



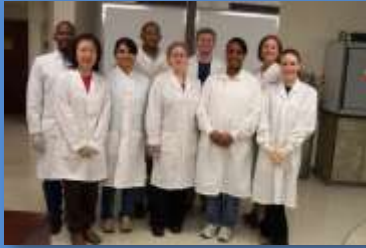
Scientific truth is a statement of probability proportional to the evidence. It will change over time as the evidence changes.

Journalism and Science Share A Pragmatic Definition



Like scientists, journalists do not believe in absolute truth. Evidence, and therefore belief, makes what we call "truth" provisional.

Journalism and Science



Another parallel: peer review

Journalism and Science



Another parallel: the journalistic process of verification resembles the scientific method

Truth is Provisional

Pluto Is Demoted to 'Dwarf Planet'



We Extend the Frontiers of Knowledge
Is Early Reporting Irresponsible?
or Essential to Peer Review?

Truth is Provisional

The New York Times

Mice Fall Short as Test Subjects for Humans' Deadly Ills



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.

The Burden is on You

Follow
the Story
Over Time

The Discipline of Verification

- ✓ Gather, Assess, and Weigh Evidence
- ✓ Place Facts In The Big Picture (Context)
- ✓ Be Fair and When Appropriate, Adjust Balance
- ✓ 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



Arm's Length Evidence



Seeking Truth

Natural Hierarchy of Direct Evidence

- Video, Photographs, Recordings
- Documents, Records, the Paper Trail
- Journalist Eyewitness Account
- Observer Eyewitness Account

Seeking Truth

Indirect Evidence:

- ✓ Accounts from Official spokespersons (i.e. Lawyer, Public Relations, Press Secretary, Press Releases)
- ✓ Expert reconstructions
- ✓ Hearsay Testimony (Second-Hand or more)
- ✓ Computer models
- ✓ Other predictions

Seeking Truth

Where does the evidence come from?

The source of that evidence can increase or decrease the strength/weight of evidence.

At a future lecture, we will discuss:

Evaluating Sources

Seeking Truth

Pulling the Evidence Together- Part I

- Consider all the evidence together
- Note any relevant evidence that is missing or irrelevant evidence that's in the way

Seeking Truth

Pulling the Evidence Together - Part II

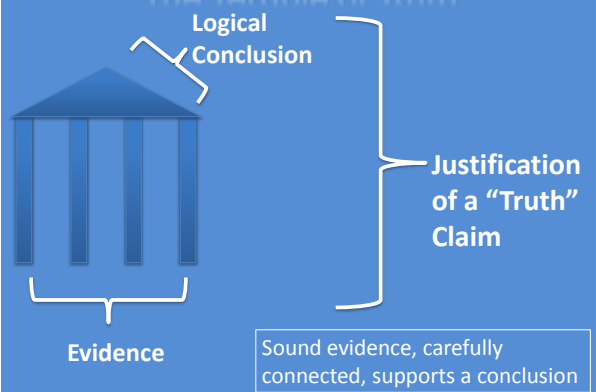
- If the evidence conflicts, decide which side is stronger/has more weight/is equal
- Decide whether the evidence is strong/heavy enough for you to be reasonably confident in declaring something as a journalistic truth.

A Temple

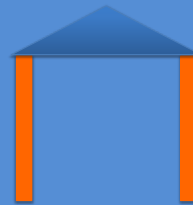


Sturdy pillars, carefully grouped, support the weight of the roof. The sum of the parts is a temple.

The Temple of Truth



The Temple of Truth



Not all Evidence is Created Equal

Direct Evidence: Journalist as witness, some documents and records, photos/recordings need less corroboration.

The Temple of Truth



Direct Evidence needs less corroboration.
Though it can be strengthened.

The Temple of Truth



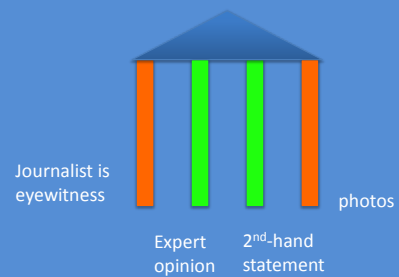
Not all Evidence is Created Equal
Indirect Evidence: Eyewitnesses, official
spokespersons, expert reconstructions,
computer models and other predictions.

The Temple of Truth



Indirect Evidence, arranged logically, can
support a sound conclusion. But it is
dramatically strengthened with direct evidence.

Combinations of different kinds of evidence
make the justification stronger



Journalistic Verification in Pursuit of The Truth Direct Evidence: Photos and Video



Direct Evidence

Climber.wmv

Journalistic Verification in Pursuit of The Truth Direct Evidence: Documents/Records:



"Birtherism" folds in the face of documentary evidence

Journalistic Verification in Pursuit of The Truth Direct Evidence: Journalist Observation



Ward1.wmv

Journalistic Verification In Pursuit of The Truth

Indirect Evidence:

WATCH OUT!



Second and Third-hand accounts:

“White House Spokesperson Jay Carney”
Police Commissioners
Expert Reconstruction/Re-creation

Journalistic Verification In Pursuit of The Truth
Indirect Evidence:

“C.J. Karamargin, an aide to
Congresswoman Gabrielle
Giffords...”



How Journalists Pursue the Truth
Indirect Evidence:



Can it! Soda studies cite stronger link to obesity

By Simon Singh
REUTERS | March 21, 2012 5:20pm EDT

Although most observational studies find that people who drink sugary beverages are more likely to be obese than people who do not, no cause-and-effect has been proved. People who drink sugary beverages, especially children, also watch more TV and eat more calorie-dense fast food, raising the possibility that liquid sugar is not the main culprit.

no cause-and-effect has been proved.

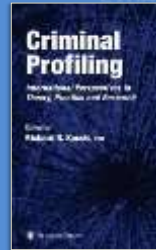
Journalistic Verification In Pursuit of The Truth Indirect Evidence



Jessica Low, a 22-year-old law student at Northeastern University, said she works during spring break. But some of her friends treat it as a week-long party. "There's no mom, no dad, no boundaries. There's lots of young people and that hard mentality sets in, like 'Let's party.'"

Journalistic Verification In Pursuit of The Truth Indirect Evidence

Expert suppositions/hypotheticals



Why Verification Breaks Down

- ✓ 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



Indonesia: Hard to find evidence of soybean cartel

Why Verification Breaks Down

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



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 never begins. It misstates the date that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed and referred incorrectly to Mr. Cronkite's coverage of D-Day. Dr. King was killed on April 4, 1968, not April 26. Mr. Cronkite covered the D-Day landing from a warplane; he did not storm the beaches. In addition, Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, not July 26. "The CBS Evening News" overtook "The Hazelley-Brosley Report" on NBC in the ratings during the 1967-68 television season, not after Charl Heston retired in 1970. A communications satellite used to relay correspondents' reports from around the world was Telstar, not Teletar. Howard K. Smith was not one of the CBS correspondents Mr. Cronkite would turn to for reports from the field after he became anchor of "The CBS Evening News" in 1966; he left CBS before Mr. Cronkite was the anchor. Because of an editing error, the appraisal also misstated the name of the news agency for which 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

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



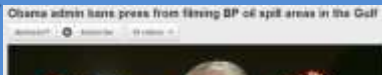
Why Verification Breaks Down

- ✓ 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



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

Verification Holds Leaders Accountable

Obama
 "If the sequester hits, federal prosecutors will have to 'let criminals go.'"



Mayor Bloomberg
 Says after Hurricane Sandy, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg "refused to allow the National Guard into the city to restore civil order because Guardsmen carry guns!"



Rep. House
 "There are more people killed with baseball bats and hammers than are killed with guns."



Key Lesson for the News Consumer

AJR American Journalism Review THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

Katrina **Myth-Making in New Orleans**

From AJR, December/January 2006

The impressive 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, can be reached at bthrossel@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

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 Like this story
 Share This

Journalist as eyewitness:



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. Follow The Story

