

Comparing Journalistic Reports to Primary Sources of Research, Part I

Step 1: Finding and example

Find an example of a quantitative research-based claim made in a news story in the popular (that is, nonscientific) news media (for example, newspaper, television, radio, internet). Your project might be more interesting if you pick a reliable source (for example, CNN or the New York Times, not the Weekly World News or People). The claim could be about politics, medicine, science, psychology, society, economics, or something else. You need to have some kind of record of the claim, so if it is a television or radio source, you'll need to find a recording of it (online or record it yourself as you watch or listen). Pick a topic that you are interested in; we'll be referring back to this news report over the next few weeks. You also might want to pick an example in a field in which you have some experience (e.g., pick a psychology example if you have had a psychology course; a biology example if you've had biology; an economics example if you've had economics, etc.)

Step 2: First impressions

Write down 1-2 sentences of your first impressions after hearing the claim. Imagine that you are summarizing the news story for a friend or family member. In addition, show the piece to a friend or family member and obtain a 1-2 sentence summary of their impressions.

Step 3: Analysis

Review the precise wording of the news story and consider the following questions.

- What claims does the news story actually make (rather than imply)?
- What claims does the news story imply?
- What information does the news story give you about the support that the newscaster has for the claim?
- Is there any explicit information about the way in which the data was collected or the experimental methods used?
- Is there any information about who collected the data or reported the results?

Step 4: Writing

Write a 1-2 page (double-spaced, Times or similar font, approx. 600 words) reflection about this news piece. Compare and contrast your first impressions with the actual claims made and implied by the news piece. Consider the types of evidence that the news story makes use of.

Step 5: Turn it in

Submit your paper on Moodle in MS Word Format (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf).