

accuracy: correctness of facts; a news story is accurate if every fact in it can be verified

angle: point of view from which a piece is written

balanced reporting: reporting in which all sides of an issue are represented equally and fairly; reporters should not show favor to any side

biased reporting: reporting in which one side is favored over another or one subject is unfairly represented; examples of bias in news reports include loaded language, limited facts and sources, sound bites taken out of context, and emotional video footage

credible: information that is trustworthy and believable; news stories are credible if the sources can be verified and trusted

loaded language: words with positive or negative suggestions that may cause strong emotions in the audience; reporters show their own opinions when they use loaded language

newsworthiness: factors that make a report worth airing or publishing; newsworthy stories have timeliness, proximity, widespread impact, human interest or emotional appeal, uniqueness, and/or compelling images or video footage

reliable: information that is trustworthy and accurate; stories are reliable if they are thorough, accurate, credible, unbiased, and newsworthy

sensationalism: the deliberate use of material or methods that stimulate viewers' interest, curiosity, or reactions, especially through exaggeration

slant: personal point of view or opinion expressed in a report; slant is the same as bias

source: a person interviewed to support details or provide facts for a news report; sources can also be any written material that the journalist used for background information

thoroughness: completeness of coverage; thorough news stories give good answers to the *5Ws* and *H* questions and consult many sources

verify: to make sure that something is true and accurate

5Ws and H questions: the six basic questions—*Who?*, *What?*, *Where?*, *When?*, *Why?*, and *How?*—reporters consider when writing news stories; questions serve as the structure for writing and editing

News reports are packaged in a variety of ways to deliver information and captivate an audience. Each format has advantages and disadvantages; however, all news stories should meet certain criteria. Understanding the criteria for a solid news report will help you evaluate whether the information is reliable.

HERE'S HOW

Strategy 1: Note whether the report is thorough. Thoroughness is completeness, which means the main questions should be answered and all sides of the story represented.

- Are the *5Ws* and *H* questions answered? The lead and first few paragraphs should immediately and concisely answer most of the six questions. The remainder of the story should elaborate on these questions and address additional points.
- What questions remain? If questions are still unanswered, ask yourself why.

Strategy 2: Consider whether the report is accurate and credible. Newspapers and broadcast stations strive to be both accurate and credible by including evidence, eyewitnesses, and experts in their reports.

- Can the facts be verified? Be wary of vague research and studies.
- Who are the sources? Watch out for unidentified sources or sources whose credentials aren't given.

Strategy 3: Make certain the report is objective. News reporters have a responsibility to be objective. Because audiences don't have access to the same information as the reporter, they rely on the reporter to present a balanced and factual report. To achieve balance, a reporter includes enough background information to provide a proper context and interviews several sources.

- Are multiple viewpoints represented? Note how many sources are included and whom they represent. If only one source is given, ask yourself why.
- What do the sound bites say? Sound bites can be taken out of context to sensationalize a story or unfairly represent a person or an issue.
- Is the reporter objective? Listen to the reporter's language, and ask yourself whether the language is loaded or whether the reporter asks leading questions.

Strategy 4: Consider newsworthiness and be aware of sensationalism. Journalists use certain criteria to determine if a story is newsworthy, or significant enough to be reported.

- Why was the story printed or aired? Ask yourself whether the story has widespread impact.
- Is the story exaggerated? Some stories are aired or printed in the hopes of garnering an audience and boosting ratings and sales.

Evaluating News Reports

Directions: The following is a script for a TV news story. Read it, and answer the following questions.

VIDEO	AUDIO
Footage of a child drinking a glass of water	Voice-over: Our local water . . .
CU of bottles of toxic chemicals	Voice-over: Is it safe? This eminent local scientist says, "Absolutely not!"
Face shot of a man in a lab coat, in a room with lots of books	Scientist: I've been researching the quality of the local water supply for a long time. It contains chemicals such as mercury, asbestos, and tetrachloroethene.
CU of bottles of Lysol, Clorox, etc.	Voice-over: Tetrachloroethene, or TCE, is a dangerous substance found in household cleaning fluids. A leading medical journal has recently shown that TCE can damage the kidneys.
Footage of a woman taking a bottle of water from a supermarket display	Voice-over: Some residents have turned to bottled water. But bottled water is expensive, and we can't use it to bathe. Effectively, we are being forced to wash ourselves in TCE.

1. What research and sources are used in this report? Are they credible? Explain. _____

2. What type of language does the reporter use? Cite examples. How does his or her language affect the story? _____

3. What video footage is used? How might the footage affect viewers' feelings or thoughts about the issue? _____

4. Is this story objective? Are multiple points of view presented? If not, how could the report be rewritten to make it objective? _____

Evaluating News Reports

Directions: Use the chart below to analyze a news story. Choose a print report, an online report, or a TV news report and rate the report based on the criteria in the chart. Then explain your rating and cite specific examples from the report to support your opinions. Finally, write your overall evaluation of the report.

Title of News Report, Source, and Date:	
Rate the news report on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best and 1 being the worst.	Explain your rating. Use specific examples from the news report.
1. Thoroughness: Does the report answer the <i>5Ws</i> and <i>H</i> questions? Are any questions unanswered? <i>Rating:</i> _____	
2. Accuracy / Credibility: Can all the facts be verified? Are all the sources named? <i>Rating:</i> _____	
3. Objectivity: Are multiple points of view presented? Is the language biased or loaded? <i>Rating:</i> _____	
4. Newsworthiness: How many newsworthy criteria does the report meet? Which ones? <i>Rating:</i> _____	
Overall Evaluation:	