

A major focus of this course is the understanding of how and why the news media cover politics as they do. This assignment calls upon you to closely follow, carefully dissect, and critically assess coverage of a topic or story that is currently in the news. You should choose **two** news outlets and follow a news story for **five days**. The story can be local, national, or international in scope. Likewise, the outlets you choose can be local, national, or international. The only requirement for the news story is that it has a *clear political focus*.

Possible news outlets to examine include (but are not limited to):

<i>Detroit Free Press</i> (www.freep.com)	<i>Detroit News</i> (www.detroitnews.com)
<i>New York Times</i> (www.nytimes.com)	<i>Politico</i> (www.politico.com)
<i>Washington Post</i> (www.washingtonpost.com)	<i>Newsmax</i> (www.newsmax.com)
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> (www.latimes.com)	<i>USA Today</i> (www.usatoday.com)
<i>CNN</i> (www.cnn.com)	<i>Fox</i> (www.foxnews.com)
<i>BBC</i> (www.bbc.com/news)	<i>Wall Street Journal</i> (www.wsj.com)
<i>The Guardian</i> (www.theguardian.com)	<i>Al Jazeera</i> (www.aljazeera.com)

Many of these outlets can be accessed through the Mardigian Library website. That can be "Plan B" in case you run into a paywall. Some news outlets allow free access to a certain number of articles, and after that they want you to pay.

You can approach your choice of news outlets in a variety of ways. For example, you might compare a national news outlets with a local outlet. Or you might compare coverage in a U.S. news outlet to coverage in an international outlet. Perhaps you can compare a "liberal" outlet to a "conservative" outlet. These choice will depend on your own interests and the nature of the news story you are following.

Carefully read and analyze **all** the material appearing in your chosen outlets for the five day period. This should include daily news stories, along with any editorials, opinion columns, or op-ed pieces that might appear. The goal is to examine the full range of coverage that is being provided to the news audience. Use course readings and discussion as a basis for reflection and critique of the coverage you read.

Suggestion: Print hard copies of the news items that you find. You'll probably need to read them more than once, and it will probably be useful to underline/highlight important features, or write notes for each story. This will come in handy as you write your paper.

The paper should begin with a brief introduction and overview of your topic and its political significance. Include a short description of the two news outlets that you are using, and of the coverage they provided (number of articles, types of articles, etc.). Be sure to explain why you chose your particular news outlets. The heart of your paper will be a critique and assessment of news coverage. This is not intended to be a formal content analysis; I don't expect elaborate charts or calculations. At the same time, I do expect more than general appraisals of the quality of coverage.

Accordingly, your analysis should address the following questions:

1. How does the news coverage conform to prevailing standards of newsworthiness? What criteria are present in the story? How do these criteria appear to be driving the coverage?
2. How does coverage of the story appear to reflect newsgathering routines? What are the most frequently cited sources? Are they predominantly "official, authoritative" sources? How are the sources identified: by name, generically, or anonymously?

3. Is a range of viewpoints or agendas represented in the coverage? Have the news outlets taken an explicit editorial stand on your topic? Does that editorial stand appear to influence the rest of the outlet's coverage?
4. What about the overall quality of coverage of the story? Is coverage event-driven? Is the story framed in an episodic, discrete, or piecemeal fashion? What kind of broader context is evident? Is there evidence of game-framing?
5. In your view, are there clear winners or losers in the coverage you've examined? Have particular politicians, groups, or points of view received noticeably more coverage, or better coverage? Do you think the public was well-served by the coverage you have examined? Why or why not?

These questions are not intended to be items that you answer directly or literally. They are intended to be reminders of what to look for as you read and analyze news coverage. Depending on the news story that you follow, some of the questions above might not actually be very pertinent. Don't hesitate to consult with me if you have any questions about this.

Key Point #1: As you address these questions, be sure to make comparisons between your two news outlets.

Key Point #2: Your project should be a **study of news coverage** of your topic, not a paper about the topic itself.

Be sure to provide examples or illustrations from individual news items to support your observations and conclusions. **Your paper should be 7-8 pages long.** Include a complete list of the news items you have read - news outlet, story title, author, date. If you prefer, you may supply copies of the news items themselves. Direct quotes from other works, or references to other writers' ideas should be cited in some standard fashion on a separate works cited page. Direct quotes from news items used for illustrative purposes should also be cited. (Note: the list of news items and the works cited page **do not** count toward the 7-8 page estimate.)

Paper Assignment #1 is due Thursday, February 22.