



Evaluating Science in the News

INTRODUCTION

Reading news articles or websites about science is a great way to learn about new ideas, discoveries, and research. But some sources of information are not as good as others. Before believing information from the news, you need to figure out if that information can be trusted.

This activity will show you how to determine if a source of information is trustworthy. First, you'll answer some questions about a science news article. Then, you'll use your answers to decide whether that article is trustworthy. Finally, you'll identify the main ideas of the article and respond personally to those ideas. You can use the methods you learn here for any news articles to help you know what news to trust.

PROCEDURE

1. Pick a news article that involves science, or get an article assigned by your instructor. If you are picking your own article, it can be something that you saw or that a friend or relative mentioned to you. The article could be from a printed source, like a newspaper or magazine, or an online source, like a website or blog.
2. *Before* reading your article, complete the following table. When multiple answers are shown, you can circle, highlight, or bold the correct answers, or you can cross out or delete the incorrect answers.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Article title | | | |
| Date published or last updated | | Is this date recent enough for your topic? Explain. | |
| Publisher or sponsor | | Is the publisher/sponsor trustworthy? What are their basic values? | |

For online articles only:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|----|--|--------|
| What domain does the URL use? | <i>Generally trustworthy:</i> .gov .edu | | <i>Can be owned by anyone:</i> .com .net .org | |
| Does the site's name match the URL? | Yes | No | Are ads on the website (if any) clearly marked? | Yes No |

3. Read the article, then complete the next table.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Author of the article | | What are the author's credentials/qualifications? | |
| What is the author trying to do? | Inform Persuade Present an opinion Sell something Entertain | What affiliations or conflicts of interest are mentioned? | |
| Does the author seem objective (uses facts, not opinions)? Explain. | Yes No | Does the author give references for data or quotations? | |

4. Read the “Criteria for Evaluating Sources” handout, which has more questions and information to help you decide if your article is trustworthy. You can answer the extra questions or just use them as a reference.
5. Based on all the information you found, is your article trustworthy? Explain your decision using evidence from your tables and the “Criteria for Evaluating Sources” handout.

6. Read the article again, looking for the main idea and supporting details. Describe the **main idea** and **4 to 6 details** from the article that support the main idea. You can do this in an outline or in a concept map. Make your descriptions specific!

7. Write a detailed paragraph reacting to the ideas in the article and their possible impacts. Your paragraph should answer one or more of the following questions:
 - a. How does the information in the article connect with what you’ve learned in science class?
 - b. How does the information in the article relate to you, your community, or society in general?
 - c. What did you find interesting or surprising about the article?

8. Review all your previous responses using the rubric at the end of this handout. Revise your work as needed to fulfill the criteria for high performance.

RUBRIC FOR THE EXTENDED HANDOUT

| Task | High performance | Medium performance | Low performance |
|---|--|---|---|
| Tables for evaluating the article <i>(Steps 2 and 3 in the handout)</i> | The tables are complete and accurate. | The tables are partly incomplete or contain inaccurate information. | One or both of the tables is incomplete. |
| Explanation of whether the article is trustworthy <i>(Step 5)</i> | The explanation is clear, well-written, and supported by evidence from the tables and the “Criteria for Evaluating Sources” handout. | The explanation is somewhat confusing or partly incomplete. | The explanation is vague, unclear, or unsupported. |
| Description of the article’s main ideas and supporting details <i>(Step 6)</i> | The description is clear, specific, and includes the main idea and 4 to 6 supporting details. | The description is somewhat vague, incomplete, or does not include enough supporting details. | The explanation is vague, unclear, or unsupported. |
| Paragraph reacting to the ideas in the article <i>(Step 7)</i> | The paragraph is clear, well-written, and answers one or more of the provided questions. | The paragraph is somewhat confusing or does not fully address the chosen question(s). | The paragraph is vague, unclear, or does not address any of the provided questions. |
| Mechanics and grammar <i>(All steps)</i> | The answers are written in complete sentences with no spelling or grammar errors. | The answers have a few spelling or grammar errors. | The answers have many spelling or grammar errors. |