Critical Thinking and News Evaluation

Assessing Sources
Defining Terms:
We are discussing a particular type of news source that is providing content that privileges a particular point of view. The question is how do we teach students to discern between the different types of sources.

Interestingly, a recent study “Fair and Balanced: Quantifying New Media” by Budak, Goel, and Rao in *Public Opinion Quarterly* found that news media political stories were surprisingly balanced, and they found “that on both filtering and framing dimensions, US news outlets are substantially more similar—and less partisan—than generally believed.”

Critical thinking provides distance and objectivity, opening a space for analysis of the type of media students are consuming and a reasoned evaluation.
First, Defining Point of View Continuum

• Where does the source fall on the continuum? Is the source neutral, slanted, or biased?

• Point of view continuum:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slanted</th>
<th>Biased</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both sides represented equally</td>
<td>Both sides represented</td>
<td>Only one side represented with one more than the other</td>
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One Oxnard resident who was deported and came back to murder (allegedly) is Maximo Tamayo-Flores. A routine traffic stop led to Flores’s undoing. When a police officer approached the small pickup truck Flores was driving, a woman jumped out screaming. Flores roared off but crashed a short distance away and was arrested after a struggle. Speaking in Spanish, the woman claimed that Flores had murdered her husband, Raymond Quintero Rodriguez, and dumped his body over the side of the Pacific Coast Highway [PCH] north of Ventura. The body was subsequently found on a rocky slope between the PCH and the surf. Flores was immediately charged with assault on a police officer and evading arrest. He was later charged with felony illegal entry into the United States, an offense applied to those who have been deported and have illegally reentered. It is expected that he will also soon be charged with the murder of Rodriguez.
The Immigration Policy Center study found that:

- At the same time that immigration—especially undocumented immigration—has reached or surpassed historic highs, crime rates have declined, notably in cities with large numbers of undocumented immigrants, including border cities like El Paso [TX] and San Diego [CA].

- Incarceration rate for native-born men in the 18–39 age group was five times higher than for foreign-born men in the same age group.

- Data from the census and other sources show that for every ethnic group, incarceration rates among young men are lowest for immigrants, even those who are least educated and least acculturated.

As the study noted, the fact that many immigrants enter the country illegally is framed by anti-immigration forces as an assault on the “rule of law,” thereby reinforcing the false impression that immigration and criminality are linked.
Introducing Critical Thinking Questions

1. What is the main argument of the text?
2. What is the major supporting evidence?
3. Is the method of development primarily deductive (are premises accurate), or inductive (is conclusion reasonable based on evidence), or mixed?
4. Explain the warrants (underlying assumptions) that connect the evidence to the claims.
5. What emotional appeals are used? In what way?
6. What fallacies are present? How so?
7. Is the overall article neutral, slanted, or biased? If not, why? If so, how?
8. Is the ethos (face, or reliability) of author strong or weak? In what way?
Evaluating Methods of Development

Deductive: provides a guarantee of the truth of the conclusion provided that the argument's premises are true (with certainty)

- Are the premises valid and true?

  - Example:
    - A+B=C
    - Crime rates have declined. Incarceration rates higher for native born and lower for first generation immigrants. Immigrants are not criminals.

Inductive: an argument that is intended by the arguer to be strong enough that, if the premises were to be true, then it would be unlikely that the conclusion is false. So, an inductive argument's success or strength is a matter of degree (probability)

- Is the conclusion inferred from the evidence accurate?

  - Example:
    - A+B=Cish, probably
    - Lady screaming he murdered husband. Body found. Assaulting of police officer. Immigrants are criminals.
Warrants: underlying assumptions that connect the evidence to the claims

• Claim: Undocumented immigrants are not committing in crimes in high numbers.

• Evidence: studies, personal narratives, data

• Warrants:
  • The author must know that immigrants have traditionally helped build nation
  • The author understands that undocumented immigrants work very hard and are “giving back”
  • The author values social justice and know that unjust situations exist in the world; he or she believes undocumented immigration is one of those situations
Evaluating Emotional Appeals

• Difference between legitimate and illegitimate

  • Illegitimate: attempts to control emotions through questionable means:
    • Appeal to authority-The government is doing it, so it must be right
    • Appeal to patriotism-If you really loved your country then...
    • Appeal to fear-They are murderers, rapists, and drug smugglers
    • Appeal to prejudice-They are all like this so...
    • Appeal to tradition-We have always done it this way

Finally, how good is the argument without the appeal?
Evaluating Fallacies

• There are many, so the best strategy is to introduce and define the big ones, providing examples that students can easily identify

• Either/or: discussing an issue as if there are only two possible choices
• Oversimplification: reducing complicated issue to overly simple terms
• Slippery slope: one step in the wrong direction will lead to dire consequences
• Ad hominem: attacks a person rather than a position
Ethos (face, or reliability) of author, website, news source

• What is the point of view of the writer/source? Neutral, slanted, biased?

• Taking into account all of the above (inductive/deductive development, warrants, emotional appeals, fallacies) how trustworthy is the source?