

Assignment 1: There's more to the story
Critical appraisal of environmental issue reporting in the media
GEO 2153
Due Oct. 20
Weight 20%

Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to further hone your critical thinking skills - in this case, regarding environmental issue reporting. One of the challenges we face as media consumers is deriving meaning from environmental reporting. What are the "facts"? Are those "facts" distorted in any way? How so? One way to sift through the rhetoric is to consult academic material on the topic at hand. Thus, you will compare media reporting with academic reporting on the same issue. You are required to use at least two types of references for this project - **"newspaper"** media reports and **journal articles**.

*"newspaper" can include online articles from media outlets (e.g., London Free Press, Globe and Mail) that also provide the same material in print form. Hence they are referred to here as "news media articles".

Goals

The primary goal of this assignment is to understand and write critically about similarities and differences in environmental reporting, while a secondary goal is to effectively use journals and media in essay writing.

Tasks

Identify an environmental issue that interests you and retrieve at least 5 "newspaper" articles (avoid editorial or opinion section pieces) and at least 2 journal articles concerning that issue. The issues are limitless, and some relatively broad examples include:

- overpopulation
- waste diversion
- climate change
- air pollution (ozone, AQHI)
- land dispossession in food production
- nuclear waste disposal
- impacts of wind turbines
- mine tailings and aquatic life
- industrial impacts on water quality
- habitat fragmentation from road construction
- consumerism

In many cases you will have to scope the issue depending on what articles (media and journal) you can find. Further, what you find in the media will be very specific - i.e. about place X (e.g., Sydney Nova Scotia) experiencing issue Y (e.g., contamination of soil/groundwater from by-products of the steel industry) - while what you can find in the academic journals may be more general (e.g., a paper by a neurologist regarding the impacts of heavy metal contamination on human health, or by an ecologist on the impacts on bird migration). In other cases you may investigate the same issue across multiple places (e.g., impacts of acid rain).

Finding "Newspaper" Articles

Here is a webpage devoted to where to find [newspaper articles online](#) .

If you are off campus make sure to sign in first at the [main library page](#). Go to the [library's database page](#) to connect to the actual database search tools for each of these ones described there (LexisNexis Academic is a good news database - advanced search). It is recommended you focus on major daily papers (e.g., Globe and Mail, Hamilton Spectator) with wide readership, since these will typically have more detailed and comprehensive coverage, particularly of international events. If you have hardcopies (actual clippings) that is fine too. Of course you can use your favourite search engine to find articles as well.

Finding Journal Articles

Journal articles come mainly from academics, are peer reviewed by other academics, and can be located via the library's various [journal databases](#). Geobase and Web of Science are good places to start.

Example: TOPIC: bird/bat mortality from wind turbines

See files - Owl Sakai > Resources > GEOGRAPH 2153A 001 FW13 Resources/Assignment 1 - example files
Canadian Newstand - searched: all(wind turbine) AND all(bird kill) - how could I have improved this search?
Web of Science - searched: Topic=(turbine) AND Topic=(kill*) AND Topic=(bird*) - I sorted these by number of times cited to find the most popular papers. The disadvantage to this strategy is that it ignores the most recent publications which have not yet had a chance to be cited.

Possible thesis/argument: The newspaper articles refer to large numbers of bird kills from wind turbines, while at least one researcher (Sovacool, 2009) estimates that bird mortality is much higher for other sources of energy (e.g nuclear and coal).

The plot thickens - Sovacool is heavily criticized by avian biologists (Willis et al., 2010), but his overall argument that fossil fuels kill more birds/bats is not undermined.

Say what!? - How to write it.

Write an essay that compares reporting (academic and media) on the environmental issue you have chosen. What are the gaps between these two forms of information on your issue? Are they complementary? Be sure to link your commentary to the course material by using key concepts from text/lecture wherever possible. Take a specific position - that is formulate a thesis - in your paper in your introduction. An example of a thesis might be: "While the media reporting on bird and bat kills overall suggest a moratorium on turbines, the scientific literature suggests that the ratio of kills/unit energy produced for turbines compared to other electricity generating technologies is relatively small.". What gaps in knowledge remain?

Submit

Hand in a **hard copy** of your essay (typed, double-spaced, formal style, title page, reference list, MAX 1000 words which is about 4 PAGES not including title and references). Please do NOT use any sort of folder, binder or protective cover (they are cumbersome and wasteful).

However, also submit your essay file to [turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com)

1. **Login** to turnitin - register if you do not have an account.
2. **Join** the course with the following credentials:

TA "All Students" ID: 10691701

"All Students" password: Reed

3. **View your originality report** (may take a little while) to ensure you are not not flagged with anything but green - otherwise we may assume [plagiarism](#). Learn why you are being flagged if not green, change your paper if required, and resubmit. Due to quirks of Turnitin, originality reports are only available to you up to the due date.

Note that you get an easy mark for submitting to Turnitin, on time. I reserve the right to refuse papers not submitted to Turnitin, and you do need to complete every course component.

Really, say what!? More on how to find material and write it.

Form and explicitly state identifiable argument(s) - you are given a lot of room to create your argument - but be sure there is some commentary on the two information sources - news media and scientific (journal) literature. For example, "While the news media articles make repeated reference to Robertson's article on habitat fragmentation, they fail to make any reference to wildlife crossings as a solution to the problem - one of Robertson's (2015, 202) main areas of research".

Find authoritative work on your issue - find papers that are cited frequently by other authors in the field. The Web of Science can be used to do this (check the Science Citation Index and Social Sciences Citation Index boxes).

Can I use books? - yes, academic books, reports, internet sources etc. may be used, and may be relevant, but for the (social) "scientific" state of the art, journals are good because they are typically peer reviewed by other scientists before they are published. Further, journals are the main source of up-to-date research in the area as books typically take years to publish. Books are very good for synthetic work - that is, they typically summarize empirical research and theory. Many books are peer reviewed, but it is often difficult to tell if this is the case.

Variety of Newspapers and Times - Choose a variety of time periods and "representative" articles to be fair about news media coverage. For example, you may find the same article appearing in several newspapers around the same time - because it is from a news wire - use only one such article.

Critical appraisal not retelling - you are given a lot of leeway in this assignment - some would say, "you have been given just enough rope to hang yourself". Thus, keep your messages/arguments focused. Do not simply retell what you see in the media articles and journal articles. In fact, the best papers will not do much summarizing/retelling at all, they will synthesize and interpret far more. Show the reader what can be learned by comparing these two domains (media and academia).

Subheadings - I am a big fan of subheadings, and you will notice most journal articles and book chapters have them. Your TA will be much happier marking with these "signposts" in your essay.

Citing Newspaper Articles - UWO libraries have style guides for [APA](#) and [MLA](#). You can find other style guides out there - I tend to use APA if given a choice. However, you should know that I will generally accept any popular/accepted citation style as long as you use it correctly and consistently (e.g., APA, MLA, Harvard). That is, there should be enough information for the reader to get the source. The web is full of newspaper citation style guides that claim to be APA, but appear to be inconsistent. This is not necessarily a problem, as long as the reader can distinguish one article from the next, and there is enough information to find each article. That said, here is a common and acceptable way (APA) to cite (in-text) the newspaper articles and include them in your reference list:

Newspaper Article With Author (do not use url, unless it is a strictly online newspaper)

Reference List:

Taylor P. (1993, December 27). Keyboard grief: Coping with computer-caused injuries. Globe and Mail, pp. A1, A4.

In-Text:

(Taylor, 1993)

Newspaper Article Without Author

Reference List:

Amazing Amazon region. (1989, January 12). New York Times, p. D11.

In-Text:

("Amazing Amazon Region", 1989)

Cite All 5+ Newspaper Articles?

The short answer is, "Yes, why not?". You will most likely cite all 5+ newspaper articles in the text of your essay. For example, the following line cites 10 articles in one sentence:

Six of the Ottawa Citizen articles (Po, 2002; Zeffer, 2002; "Killer Earthquake", 2002; Blog, 2002; Said, 2002; Ableson, 2002) and four of the London Free Press articles (Domi, 2002; Williams; 2002; Carsons 2002; "Earthquake Toll Rises", 2002) focus attention on specific "human dramas" by telling a story about an individual or a family.

Marking

20 marks 5 style + 15 content

see [comments from TAs for 2015](#)

Style (5/20 marks)

- title page (-1)
- reference list (-1)
- introductory paragraph (-1) - introduce the purpose of your paper, state your position on the degree to which the two domains overlap, and provide a roadmap for the rest of the paper
- concluding paragraph (-1) - revisit your main point, summarize, comment on potential directions for policy or research
- spelling/grammar (-2 max) - up to two marks can be lost, the first few are free, from then on marks are lost at the TA's discretion
- formal style (-2 max) - other formal style issues (e.g., slang, acronyms, contractions) TA's discretion

Content (15/20 marks)

- Introduction - 2 marks - give a clear context and road map for the paper.
- Remaining Content - 12 marks - be sure to reference key concepts in the course - e.g., science, values/worldview, precautionary principle
- Conclusion - 1 marks - summarize, conclude and point out potential implications
- Not submitted to Turnitin? (-1)