

Your Name

JOUR 302: Infomania

Discussion Professor's Name

Due Date

Research Brief 3: Issue

Topic

Journalists and other communications professionals often need to become familiar with issues in which they may not be interested, and to identify sources they can use to understand these issues better. In this assignment, you are expected to demonstrate that you can (1) find information about an issue with which you are not familiar, (2) describe and evaluate how you searched for and found this information, (3) identify and evaluate the sources you found, and (4) summarize the information you found.

When thinking about the information you search for, find, evaluate, and synthesize, imagine that you are completing the brief for a local reporter who will write or record a story about your issue. If you need to get in the right frame of mind, the episode Very Tough Love of the podcast This American Life might help you get there.

Step-by-Step Instructions for this Assignment

Receive a local issue assignment from your instructor. You can appeal to your instructor to cover a different **local** issue that's not being covered by your classmates.

News

- Re-read the Search More Effectively chapter in the Be Credible textbook.
- Search the web for information about this issue. Use at least **two search operators**.
- Read the News chapter in the Be Credible textbook.
- Search news archives for this issue and construct a chronology of this issue.
- Search news archives for similar issues happening elsewhere, and about any context that's important to understanding this issue.

Data

- Read the Data chapter in the Be Credible textbook.
- Search for public data related to this issue, or to the context that's important to understanding this issue. Create a graph using data you find.

Research Study

- Read the Scholarly Research chapter in the Be Credible textbook.
- Search for a scholarly research study that is related to this issue, or to the context that's important to understanding this issue.

Source Evaluation Steps

- Re-read the Evaluate Information Vigorously chapter in the Be Credible textbook.
- Re-read the Go Lateral with Cues and Evidence chapter in the Be Credible textbook.
- Identify all of the individual sources your searches turned up. For example, a news article is a source, a dataset is a source, a research study is a source.
- For each source, determine if it is a primary or a secondary (or a tertiary) source. Collect evidence to support this determination.

- For each source, list the cues that say something about the credibility of this source. This is an incomplete list of possible credibility cues: publisher, author, date, content, sources, writing style, bias, visuals. Not every source will contain all of these cues.
 - Investigate each cue, and collect evidence about it. Use this evidence to determine the extent to which the cue contributes to or diminishes the credibility of the source.
 - Keep detailed notes on the sources, cues, cue evidence, and your determination of each source's credibility
- Use all of this information to complete sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this document.

Section 1: Search Strategies and Results

Use bullet points or numbers to **list all of the searches** you performed, and to **fully explain your thinking** behind each search.

As you list each search:

- Identify the collection of sources you searched (e.g., Google Scholar), and the search term you typed into the search box.
- Briefly explain your thinking about why you used this collection and this search term. If your thinking is related to the results of a previous search, explain this connection.
- Briefly explain the results of each search, which results you pursued further, which you didn't, and why.

At the end of this section, write a **reflection** about all the searches you completed, and all the information you found. Evaluate the effectiveness of your search strategies and results. Support your evaluation with specific evidence from the list of searches and results. This is a critical thinking class. Show some critical thinking about what you did, why you did it, whether or not it worked, and what you learned in the process.

Grading hints:

- *In this assignment, your instructor is looking to see that you are searching the different collections of information discussed in the three textbook chapters covered in this unit. As you did previously, show that you are also using sophisticated search strategies.*
- *Show critical thinking as you reason through the search strategies you use and the results you get. Your goal is NOT for all your searches to hit the jackpot. Your goal is to show that you are a thoughtful and critical researcher.*

Section 2: Source Evaluation

Use bullet points or numbers to **list all of the sources** your searches turned up, and to **fully explain your evaluation** of each source.

As you list **each source**, attribute it:

- Provide enough information so that anyone can find the source and look at it.
- Embed a link to every publicly accessible online source (avoid pasting unreadable URLs). Include a screenshot or a photograph of each source that can't be linked to online.

Evaluate **each source**:

- Your ultimate goal is to explain whether or not each source is credible enough for you to use in a report on your issue.

- Use the evaluation information you generated earlier to explain and support your thinking (see “Source Evaluation Steps,” above). Your explanation needs to include these parts:
 - An explanation about whether the source is primary or secondary, evidence supporting this, and a statement about whether this contributes to or diminishes the source’s credibility.
 - A list of all of the credibility cues for this source.
 - Evidence about each cue, including any necessary quotations, embedded links, screenshots, etc.
 - An explanation about whether, based on this evidence, the cue contributes to or diminishes the credibility of the source.
 - A synthesis statement about each source that re-states the key evidence presented above. This statement should start with the phrase, “Overall, this source is / is not credible enough for me to use because”

Instead of writing in paragraphs, for each source you can (but don’t have to) use a table like this:

Source: Insert the name of the source here, and embed a link to it.

Cue	Evidence	Contributes to (+) or diminishes (-) the source’s credibility
Primary/secondary	Evidence about primary/secondary	+ / -
Cue 1 name	Evidence about cue 1	+ / -
Cue 2 name	Evidence about cue 2	+ / -
Cue 3 name	Evidence about cue 3	+ / -
	DO NOT stop at 3 cues. Add a new row for each additional cue (right-click and press “Insert” and “Rows Below”)	

Synthesis statement: Overall, this source is / is not credible enough to use because ...
[synthesize the key evidence and arguments from the table]

Grading hints:

- *Your instructor is looking for you to show that you question the credibility of everything. For every credibility assertion you make, ask yourself “why?”, and investigate further. Keep asking “why?”*
- *Do not rely on gut feelings about the credibility of sources. Your evidence needs to come from somewhere other than yourself.*
- *If you use the table, make sure that the information in the “Evidence” column is complete. In each row, use multiple full sentences, links, quotes, and any other information to support your thinking.*
- *Don’t forget the synthesis statement, and don’t skim on the evidence you re-state in it.*

Section 3: Research Brief

Summarize the most important and interesting information you found about the issue.

The summary should tell a story. Start with the most interesting details and save the less interesting stuff for later.

Your writing should be thorough but not excessively detailed.

Attribute all information to the appropriate sources in the summary. Use the phrase “according to” as much as you need to; do not worry about sounding redundant. **Embed links** to sources that are openly accessible on the Internet. (For a refresher, read the [Attribute All Sources](#) chapter in the Be Credible textbook.)

Remember that in journalism, paragraphs are short, usually no more than four sentences long. There is no limit on how many paragraphs you write.

Section 4: Data

Paste the screenshot of a spreadsheet that contains data about your issue, and the graph that you created by yourself based on these data.

Write one paragraph explaining what these data show. Attribute and link to the source of these data.

How to Handle and Submit this Assignment

- Save this document to your computer.
- At the top of this page, change “Your Name,” “Discussion Professor’s Name” and “Due Date.” The “Topic” is your assigned issue. Get rid of the yellow highlighting.
- Save the document periodically so you do not lose your work.
- As you complete the assignment, refer to the grading rubric on Blackboard to understand how the assignment will be graded.
- Delete all sections of the document that are in blue (like this one). All text in the final document should be black.
- When finished, click on the appropriate assignment in Blackboard and upload this document using the “Attach File: Browse My Computer” button.
- Submit a Word file. **Don’t submit a PDF file. Don’t submit a Pages file.** If you use Pages, save your file as a Word document before uploading. If you upload a Pages document, your instructor will not be able to read it or grade it.
- Make sure that the assignment uploads completely. Your Internet connection and Blackboard can malfunction during the submission process. It is **your responsibility** that your assignment upload is successful.
- Go back and check that your assignment is submitted. Take a screenshot to document that your assignment was fully submitted before the deadline. Save the screenshot to your computer.

BE CREDIBLE: do not fabricate or plagiarize. The consequences are not worth it.