COMA 120, "Introduction to Media Studies," Spring 2023
Prof. Marnie Ritchie

Critical Make #1 for Unit 1 (News): Team News Audit[1]

<mark>**Hard Deadline:** By class time (12:30 PM PDT) on Monday, March 6th</mark>
Soft Deadline: By class time (12:30 PM PDT) on Friday, May 19th
How to Submit: Through the Assignments Tab on Sakai (just one person needs to submit it)

Overview
In assigned teams (below), you will choose *one* US media outlet and research that organization's editorial and reporting standards—its processes of information verification and fact-checking that it uses to ensure reliability, accessibility, transparency, and fairness in their reporting. Your team will conduct a content analysis of the outlet by choosing FIVE (5) articles from the hard news sections (US local/regional news, World news, politics, etc.--no sports, entertainment, or arts) to assess according to a checklist of best journalist practices. You can choose any US media outlet, *except for the New York Times* and *Seattle Times* (our examples).

On Choosing an Outlet
In class, your team will submit your top three choices.

Structure of News Audit
Your team will compile a written content analysis. I suggest you collaborate over a Google Doc to do so. Your analysis should include these six sections, with each section labeled:

1. **History of the Outlet (at least 100 words):** Please provide a brief history of the news outlet. When did it begin? Who founded it? Who now owns it? What was its original audience and purpose? How has it changed? Why are these changes important for how it produces the news?

2. **Reporting Standards (at least 100 words):** Please assess the organization's policies related to editorial and reporting standards (i.e. the *New York Times* has a Handbook of Ethical Journalism). What kind of policy do they use? When did they write it and update it? Do you think it is sufficient (Why/Why not)? *If your outlet does not use reporting standards, please discuss the implications of its absence.*

3. **Comments Section Policy and Social Media Moderation (at least 100 words):** Please assess the news outlet's policies related to its comments section and its moderation of its social media accounts. Does it permit comments? Does it moderate them? Do they collaborate with outside organization for this moderation? What does it use social media for?

4. **Close Analysis of Articles (You may use a bulleted format for this):** Please write a thorough response to each component in your content analysis of **the five (5) articles** of your choice. I suggest you choose relatively recent articles, give yourself some standard parameters for your close reading. Give a full citation of each of the articles you chose to analyze. Include author(s), title, date published, and URL.
   - *Headlines*: Are the headlines misleading or clickbait-y? Do the headlines use all caps or exclamation points?

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[1] This assignment is adapted from Dr. Kate Hoyt's COMA 120 class; the structure of the news audit has been modified.

- *Language*: Is the language sensationalist or measured? Is it designed to make the reader feel a particular way? Does it go in-depth or does it remain surface-level?
- *Writers/reporters*: Do the authors of the articles write for other outlets, or do they have another role that could represent a conflict of interest?
- *Advertising*: Is the advertising distracting or disruptive? What sorts of advertisers does the site attract?
- *Sources*: What sources does the article use (interviews, links to outside sources, links to other articles)? Are these sources credible? If anonymous sources are used, does the story have at least one named source?
- *Images*: If images are used, is a source given? Is the image manipulated or distorted?

5. **Evaluation of Intersectionality of Outlet (at least 100 words)**: Using Chelsea Peterson-Salahuddin's model of intersectional journalism, assess the extent to which your outlet engages in intersectional journalism. Support your claims with evidence (from articles, agenda-setting, outlet history, internal policies and practices related to diversity, gatekeeping, etc. etc.).

6. **Rating and Implications (at least 100 words)**: Summarize your findings. What can we learn about news media from your audit? On a scale of 0-100 (100 being the highest), how would you rate the reliability of your outlet? What is the justification for your rating? Use your audit as evidence.

Citations & Library Resources
Please cite sources and use a consistent citational format (APA, MLA, Chicago). For more information on how to cite in each of these formats, please visit the PLU Library's resource. I encourage you to reach out to the library for a one-on-one consultation if you have questions about how best to conduct research.

Peer Review
I strongly recommend you peer review one another's work. It should read like one voice.

Assessment
Value: 100 points
- *Background:* A history of the organization was presented and thoroughly researched.
- *Reporting Standards:* Relevant policies discussed and analyzed, clear understanding of organization's ethical standards
- *Comments Section:* An explanation of the comments section and social media policies was presented; necessary information related to moderation given
- *Thoroughness of Trust Indicators Analyzed:* Analysis covered headlines, reporters, advertisements, sources, and images and did so with a clear understanding of their implications on media literacy
- *Attention to Intersectional Journalism:* Demonstrates understanding of Chelsea Peterson-Salahuddin's model of intersectional journalism; attentive to race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.
- *Final Assessment:* A final assessment of the reliability of the news organization was given and its justification sound. Insights are supported from audit itself.

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Team Presentations

Overview
Your team will have the opportunity to present your audit to the class so that we can learn about various US news outlets and become more informed news consumers.

Time: 10 minutes for content, and then 5 minutes devoted to Q&A (So, 15 minutes total)

Structure of Presentation
It is recommended that your presentation have the following components:
- **History of the News Outlet**
- **Reporting Standards**
- **Comments Section**
- **An Overview of Your Close Reading** – It can be tedious for the audience to go article by article, so I recommend giving an summary of your close readings.
- **Evaluation of Intersectionality**
- **Rating and Implications** – Please be sure to tell us your rating, the rationale for the rating, and what we can learn about news literacy from your audit
- **Question & Answer Period** – Please leave at least 5 minutes for the audience to ask questions. Be mindful that you allow every member to answer a question.

Assessment
Value: 50 points
The presentation is assessed on the basis of:
- *Content*: Included history, standards, comments, overview, rating, intersectionality, implications; thorough with analysis; explained significance of findings; left time for Q & A and responded thoughtfully to questions
- *Aesthetics:* The presentation is clear, informative, illustrative; effort was made to speak to the class directly, in a conversational and professional manner; each member of the team contributed equally

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Teams & Presentation Dates

To reduce human bias, teams are assigned via a randomizing algorithm. If you go by a name other than listed below, please email me (ritchiem@plu.edu), and I will correct it.

M 03/06	Team Presentation Day (Everyone should come so we have a full audience!)	**Team 1: Wall Street Journal** 1. Names removed **Team 2: MSNBC** 1. Names removed **Team 3: NPR** 1. Names removed **Team 4: Washington Post** 1. Names removed
W 03/08	Team Presentation Day (Everyone should come so we have a full audience!)	**Team 5: Buzzfeed News (RIP)** 1. Names removed **Team 6: KOMO** 1. Names removed **Team 7: CNN** 1. Names removed **Team 8: Huff Post** 1. Names removed
F 03/10	Team Presentation Day (Everyone should come so we have a full audience!)	**Team 9: NBC** 1. Names removed **Team 10: Vice** 1. Names removed