

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Reporting the News

Media Critique Project

The goal of this assignment is to help students develop the ability to critically analyze not only *what* news is presented in the national broadcast media today but also *how* it is presented. The question of how news is presented implies that we must always watch news with an eye trained on *bias*, which is the other major goal of this assignment. The focus here will be on national news coverage (not local or state), as presented either through traditional network news channels or the many offerings on cable. Additionally, your focus will be on political news specifically and you'll need to tailor your viewing accordingly. But, remember that many stories are political stories at their core even if indirectly so; for example, a story on the current immigration issue and how it affects U.S. politics does count as a political story. Here are the requirements:

Step 1

- Watch—live, DVR'd, or streamed on-line—at **least 2 hours of national news coverage** between now and the assignment due date. Diversify your perspective by watching **at least 3 different networks** (e.g., NBC, Fox, and PBS); however, **30 minutes of your time must be The News Hour** on PBS. The list below will get you started. Watch each show for **at least a half hour at a time so that you see the whole dynamics of a broadcast**.
 - ✓ National network news on ABC, CBS, or NBC. Check local listings.
 - ✓ *The News Hour* on PBS (Channel 9 KQED).
 - ✓ *The Situation Room* on CNN.
 - ✓ *The Rachel Maddow Show* on MSNBC.
 - ✓ *Hardball with Chris Mathews* on MSNBC.
 - ✓ Any of the MSNBC programming. Check for shows/times.
 - ✓ *The Sean Hannity Show* on Fox News.
 - ✓ Any of the Fox News hours/shows such as *Fox and Friends*. Look for show times.
 - ✓ Any of the 3 major network Sunday talk shows—*Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, or *This Week*. Start times vary, check listings. Most start early on Sunday between 7 and 8 a.m. Yes, it's early but I highly recommend you check out at least one of these, as they are the heavy hitters in the industry.

Step 2

- We will be discussing what you saw during our next Town Hall. Utilize the following questions that you see below to guide your potential verbal responses. Be a critical thinker... why are you viewing what you are viewing and why is it presented in the format that it is?
 1. Note each show you watched and who were the featured hosts.
 2. How much time was devoted to each story? Over the course of the broadcast, what comprised the bulk of the news or what kinds of stories were reported most?
 3. What was the issue being reported? Who was interviewed and how much time was given to each side? Do they represent experts from each side?

4. Indicate the labels used to refer to people. Pay attention to the language/terminology used. What observations can you make?
5. Make note of any indications of bias. Consider the political spectrum, from liberal to conservative and place the show on that spectrum.
6. Make note of presentation style. What observations can you make about the use of graphics and production/theatrical techniques? How does the host act/present him or herself? How does this add to the show or is it a distraction? Why is it presented in such a way?
7. Make note of story selection bias. What stories are reported? What stories are left out?
8. How are the questions framed? Any skewing of the discussion? Are all sides equally represented or given equal time?
9. Any critique involves both what works about a piece and what doesn't. What does the media get right? What do they get wrong? How do you think the media/journalist could have better informed their audience?