GRADE THE NEWS

Scoring Instructions

1. Rating Topics: A *core* story is about something of greater lasting importance than a peripheral story, thus it gets more points. Place story in the most appropriate category.

Core stories are about:

politics/government- at all levels, anything about campaigns, actions or deliberations or hearings. If overlaps with other categories place here only if most of sources are from people in gov./pol.

natural disaster- floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, etc.; must be great human or physical damage.

education- all levels, school readiness, testing, teachers, facilities, pre-school, etc.

economics/business- anything about economy, labor, wealth, employment, private companies….

crime/justice- crimes (including domestic terrorism), investigations trials; prevention, courts/justice system, gun control, etc.

health- include medicine, HMO's, patient's rights, fitness, nutrition, worker safety, smoking, etc.

environment- air/water/noise pollution, prevention, urban sprawl, agriculture, global warming, etc.

science/technology- (non-medical) physical/social science discoveries, theories, computers, gadgets.

major fires/accidents- must include death(s), major damage (>1000 acres burned; >$10 million damage).

weather- forecasts, reports of storms, etc. short of natural disaster.

social issues- serious only, e.g., discrimination, transportation, housing, energy, family, population, immigration, but not fads.

consumer reporting- must name retailers, products, and contain explicit price/quality comparisons, requires critical (non-promotional) tone and evidence-gathering.

military- armed forces, foreign terrorism, budgets, exercises, treaties.

Peripheral stories are about:

celebrities- from sports/entertainment, their lives, deaths, marriages, breakups, new shows, arrests….

sports- including hobbies/recreation, scholastic, amateur and professional.

lesser fires/accidents- non-lethal, also mishaps, pipe breaks, etc. where damage less severe (under 1000 acres burned, <$10 million property loss). Also traffic reports, lost hikers, minor snafus.

human interest- seasonal celebrations, lost pets, emotional reunions, fashion fads, boat or car shows, popular culture including TV hits, movies, unusual photos or videos, freak vegetables, etc.

What's missing: Notice core topics that are ignored. But keep in mind that no single day's coverage can be expected to cover every topic. If certain core topics are repeatedly neglected, however, the news is incomplete.

2. Knowledge Impact: If the purpose of news is not to turn heads, but fill them, what we learn from news is more important than its emotional impact on us. So thematic "big picture" reporting about *issues,* or patterns connecting events adds substantial news value. Such stories typically affect large numbers of readers or viewers in a lasting (more than six months) way.

In contrast, episodic "snapshot" reporting about a specific event, or perhaps a roundup of similar events — a series of fires or crimes related by time (having happened recently) but not by any broader theme — adds little. Such reporting may even detract — keeping us from seeing the forest for the trees. Even if the incident is extremely violent, perhaps a murder, it usually directly affects less than 10% of the 7 million residents of the Bay Area. Some incidents, such as floods, earthquakes, may have impact.

3. Named sources: Sources literally make the news. The more there are and the more diverse their viewpoints the better. *Naming* sources is also important. It allows you to decide how much credence to give their information. It also tips you off about their biases.

Newspapers have more space than TV has time, so we'll set the bar low to level the playing field. If a story has 3 or more identified sources (named individuals, not "police" or "lawmakers"), it's *adequately sourced.* Fewer than 3, it's *under-sourced*. Since we eliminated the briefest stories, 3 seems a fair standard; two sides can be represented plus someone in the middle.

Overall source diversity: News should reflect the public, so we'll only include U.S. stories. Who is missing or under-represented as sources? Also notice stereotyping — are certain groups invisible *except* in crime or sports reporting?

Tallying the score: Begin by going down the columns. Add each story's scores. They will sum between 1 and 7 points. Now go across to find the average. Add each story's total, then divide that sum by the number of stories. (*Optional fairness adjustment*: if a story is exceptionally long-- more than 4 minutes on TV, or more than half a full newspaper page — count it as two stories in computing the average.)

Grades: News media are businesses. They may need to devote some stories simply to attracting audience. But since we're only rating the top stories, a strong newscast or newspaper could be expected to be half excellent and half mediocre. So we'd give an A if the all-story mean is 5.25 or higher. (5.25 is the average of 7, excellent, and 3.5, mediocre). Compare your average with the following:

If average is 5.25 or higher, grade is A   **If average is 4.25 to 5.24, grade is B**

If average is 3.25 to 4.24, grade is C   **If average is 2.25 to 3.24, grade is D**

If average is less than 2.25, grade is F

Make your grade count: To be most effective, send your score card and any concerns about missing topics or diverse sources to the managing editor (if it's a newspaper) or news director (if TV). Include the date and, if a newscast, the air time. And send it to us for posting on the site. Be sure to congratulate them if they've done well.

The managing editor is named in the paper, usually on pg. 2 and on the editorial page. The paper's address is also printed in both places. Here are the names and addresses of local TV news directors:

Channel 2: Ed Chapuis , KTVU-TV, P.O. Box 22222, Oakland, CA 94623-2222

Channel 4: Stacy Owen, KRON-TV, P.O. Box 3412, San Francisco, CA 94109-5982

Channel 5: Dan Rosenheim, KPIX-TV, P.O. Box 26555, San Francisco, CA 94126-6555

Channel 7: Kevin Keeshan, KGO-TV, 900 Front St., San Francisco, CA 94111-1450

Channel 11: Jim Sander, KNTV-TV, 645 Park Ave., San Jose, CA 95110-2613

Channel 15: Roberto Munoz, KCU-TV, 2349 Bering Dr., San Jose, CA 95131-1125