

Instructions for Campaign '04 News Scorecard

Thank you for helping hold local TV stations to the public service obligations they owe in return for free use of our airwaves. The answers you provide us will be tallied and summarized at www.gradethenews.org. If you are taking part in this exercise, you probably share our belief that citizen monitoring of election coverage is a powerful way to critique and ultimately improve the quality of the news we see.

Here's how to proceed

1. Record on a VCR or DVD one or more local newscasts (not the network news with Peter Jennings or Dan Rather, but the one prepared by the station in your area). This slows it down enough for analysis. *We will only analyze newscasts airing between 5 and 11:30 p.m. because that's when most people are watching. Include weekends.*
2. Fill out one "Campaign '04 News Scorecard" per newscast. Begin by writing in the newscast date in mm/dd form, e.g., 10/05. Enter the station call letters, e.g., KRON, the metro area from which the broadcast originates and the time the newscast begins. Next fill in your i.d. information. This is optional, but allows us to contact you if there are any questions about your data. *It will be used for no other purpose.*
3. Watch the newscast and pause the VCR after each story about the political campaign. We will only analyze stories about the political campaign and the Nov. 2 election.
4. Fill in question 1, noting the topic of the story. Write in the time (in minutes: seconds) in one of the blanks within the appropriate topic category. Follow the same approach for question 2 about the contest that same story is about. There are five blanks, one per story. Leave those you don't need empty. Add others to the right, if there are more than five stories in that category.
5. If there is an announcement of a special campaign broadcast, note its date and time (including a.m. or p.m.) in question 3. Leave question 3 blank if there's no mention of a special broadcast (something beyond regular scheduled newscasts). For question 4, briefly describe anything that particularly struck you about the newscast -- good or bad.
6. At the end of the newscast, fill in total time for each category. Put a 0 under "total time" for any empty categories in questions 1 or 2. If there were no campaign stories, enter 0s for all columns.
7. After you evaluate a newscast, send it in either by fax to Media Alliance, 415-546-6128, or preferably -- fill in your data online by going to the Survey Monkey Web site. The URL is: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=72570649481>.

Here are more details about answering the questions.

1. Topic of story

Pick the single most appropriate topic. If the story concerns more than one topic, choose the one they spent the most time on. If two topics are about equal, choose the one introduced first. (Generally, a story will be read by an anchor or introduced by an anchor and covered by a single reporter. To make scoring easier, consider "team coverage" or other stories with multiple reporters as separate stories.):

Horseshoe coverage -- stories about who is ahead in the polls, fund-raising, trends in voter preferences, campaign strategies, the winner/loser of a debate, etc. Turning politics into a game may provide insight, but it usually doesn't tell us much that we can use to decide for whom or what to vote.

Issue reporting -- stories aimed at informing the public about campaign issues: content of propositions, candidate platforms, profiles, key issues, pros and cons of candidates' stands or propositions, accuracy of claims made by campaigns (other than in the form of political advertisements) and endorsements of candidates or ballot measures. This category is key because it helps prepare local residents to make good choices in the ballot box on Nov. 2.

Logistics -- stories about voter registration numbers, polling places, voting technology, etc.

Analysis of political ads -- stories that check on the truth or falsity of paid political ads , e.g. "ad watch," etc. Also include stories about the impact of such claims, their sponsorship, etc.

Other campaign reporting -- stories that don't fit in any of the categories above, but are still about the upcoming election.

If a story is about politics, but doesn't directly concern the November election, skip it.

2. Contest the story spends the most time reporting about

Across the state, voters will choose a presidential and vice presidential ticket; there is one U.S. Senate race (for Barbara Boxer's seat), 53 contests for the U.S. House of Representatives, and 100 California legislative contests (80 in the state Assembly and 20 in the state Senate). This fall there will be 16 statewide ballot measures. Depending on where you live there may be local ballot measures and there will be local races for county supervisor, city council, school board and other offices. (For further information on them, check SmartVoter at www.smartvoter.org.)

We want to document how well local stations prepare us at each level -- presidential, congressional, state legislative, etc. Since the presidential race will be extensively covered by the networks, local stations have a particular obligation to cover state and local races.

Please note the time in minutes and seconds for each story and place it in the appropriate category. If a story is about contests at two or more levels, say presidential and state legislative, put it in the category where the most time was spent. If the time spent at each level was about equal, divide the story time among those categories.

Note that some stories -- such as those about logistics -- won't fit in any category. For such stories, skip question 2.

3. Special political broadcasts in prime time

If the station is preparing a special broadcast about the campaign, it will announce it on a newscast. Note here the date and time of any special coverage the station plans, even if it's not in prime viewing hours. (If you are analyzing San Francisco Bay Area stations, please alert us (jmcmannus@stanford.edu) before the special election broadcast airs so that we have a chance to review it.)

4. Reaction to the newscast

In a sentence or two describe anything about the political reporting that you found particularly praiseworthy, condemnable or just odd.

Thank you very much! The results of your effort will be tabulated by Grade the News, a research project at Stanford University and available on the Web site www.gradethenews.org, as well as the Media Alliance Web site, www.media-alliance.org. We will also send the research report to the news directors of each station evaluated.