

Research in the News: Science Communication

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Learning Object: Lesson Plan/Activity

UCR Information Literacy Outcomes: 2.a, 3.b, 3.c, 4.b, 4.e

Time to teach: 45 minutes (15 minutes pre-read, 30 minutes in class)

Summary: In this activity, students will review two articles: a research article, and a news article based on the research article. In small groups, students will compare and contrast elements of each article, including:

- Author/creator
- Audience and tone
- References/attribution
- Article elements (e.g., sections, headings, figures and graphs, multimedia, reference pages)

Discussion questions for a whole-group discussion following the activity are included.

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Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this session, students will be able to

1. Identify common outlets for sharing scientific information and the features of each
2. Analyze the differences between each information source in order to choose the appropriate source for their information needs.

Materials

1. Scientific research article and news article referencing the research article (3 examples below)
 - A. Champagne bubbles
 - Scholarly article: [Presence of surfactants controls the stability of bubble chains in carbonated drinks](#)
 - News article: [There's a reason Champagne bubbles rise in neat straight lines](#)
 - B. Wildfire smoke and air quality
 - Scholarly article: [Mortality Burden From Wildfire Smoke Under Climate Change](#)
 - News article: [Wildfire smoke contributes to thousands of deaths each year in the U.S.](#)
 - C. Avocados and heart health
 - Scholarly article: [Effect of a Moderate Fat Diet With and Without Avocados on Lipoprotein Particle Number, Size and Subclasses in Overweight and Obese Adults: A Randomized, Controlled Trial](#)
 - News article: [Bite Back At Bad Cholesterol: Eat An Avocado A Day](#)

Instructions

1. Assign students the articles to read before class, or set aside time in class for students to skim the articles' contents. Remind them they are reading the articles less for the details of the article, and more for *how* the content is presented.
2. In class, ask students to work in small groups to compare and contrast:
 - a. Author/creator
 - b. Audience and tone
 - c. References/attribution
 - d. Article elements (e.g., sections, headings, figures and graphs, multimedia, reference pages)
3. Review as a whole group

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do universities and researchers publicize their research articles? What are the benefits of this? Does it raise any challenges or concerns?

2. After graduating from college, most people have limited access to scholarly research information. Why does science news matter?
3. When comparing the two articles, even though they are about the same thing, you may have noticed that some information is taken out of context, or important information about study limitations is not shared in the news article. Why do you think that is?

Level up:

Provide students with only the citation to the news article, and challenge them to find both the news and research article based on the citation information.