

How to Find, Evaluate, and Summarize Validated Independent News Stories (VINS) Project Censored

Find a Candidate Story

A censored news story reports information that the public has a right and need to know, but to which the public has limited access. Search **independent** news sources to find candidate stories. See the Project Censored website for recommended independent news sources:

<http://www.projectcensored.org/independent-news-links/>

<http://www.projectcensored.org/independent-periodicals-webzines/>

Through your school's library, ProQuest's Alt-Press Watch is also a useful database.

Evaluate Your Candidate Story's Strength

The strongest candidate stories—those most likely to gain a spot among the top censored stories in a given year—are important, timely, fact-based, well documented, and under-reported. Once you have found a candidate story, test its significance by considering these questions:

1. Is it **important**? The more people that the story affects, the more important it is. Be careful to consider indirect impacts. For example, a story about electronic waste disposal in Africa might seem like it only involves the people exposed to the toxic waste. But the problem of electronic waste disposal includes Western consumers (mostly North Americans and Europeans) who discard as much as 40 million tons of electronic waste each year. So, the story involves a wider circle of people and is more important than it might first seem.
2. Is it **timely**? Only stories published since March 2017 will be considered for *Censored 2019*. Recent stories on older events will be considered if they report new, important information.
3. Is it **fact-based** and **well documented**? The story's accuracy and credibility is crucial. Dramatic claims and seductive rhetoric do not matter if the journalist fails to provide *specific evidence* to support the story. How many different sources does the story use? How credible is each source? A story based on a number of reliable sources is harder to dispute than one based on a single good source or several biased sources. If your story cites other published work (for example, a scientific study, government document, or another news story), track back to that source and read it. Does your story accurately depict the original?
4. Has the corporate media ignored or **under-reported** the story? Evaluate your story's coverage by using a news database (such as LexisNexis News, part of Lexis-Nexis Academic; ProQuest Newstand; or Newspaper Source Plus) to search for corporate coverage of it. Check with your instructor or your school's reference librarian to learn what news databases you can access. Experience shows that Google News is not always reliable; use it as a last resort. The clearest "censored" stories are ones that corporate media have completely ignored. Candidate stories that received some corporate coverage may still be considered "censored" if corporate coverage leaves the reader with an incomplete or distorted understanding of the story.
5. As you research your candidate story, **be alert for related stories** that (1) contain information contrary to your original story, (2) were published before your original story, or (3) contain more complete information than your first story. You may decide a second story is better than your first, in which case continue your work now using the second story. Or you may conclude that the second story supports the first and should be included along with it.

Summarize Your Candidate Story

All candidate stories submitted to Project Censored should use the following format. Incomplete or improperly formatted stories will be returned for revision.

TITLE This captures the story's most important point in approximately five to ten words.

SUMMARY (250-400 words)

The first paragraph should provide a specific, concise and factual summary of the story's most important point. Use a **summary lead** to place this essential information up front. Your first sentence should introduce **what** happened, **where**, and **when**. Be specific. Use active verbs. Avoid passive constructions (for example, "Civilians were targeted") that tend to hide agency (who did what). Your summary lead should address the skeptical reader's questions, "So what? Why is this important?" If the main point of your story is controversial, which is often true for Project Censored stories, an attribution will add strength to your lead paragraph. For example,

In January 2012, Fairtest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, reported that a decade of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies has actually slowed the rate of education progress.

For more on how to write a lead or opening paragraph, including several examples of summary leads, see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/05/>.

The next paragraph should go into more detail, elaborating on the story's main point and/or introducing secondary points. Good detail might include who stands to benefit from the action or policy in question, as well as who (if anyone) it harms.

A final paragraph should address **corporate media coverage** of the story. This is often as important as your story's summary lead. It is essential that you do a thorough job of researching your story's coverage using a reliable news database. If there is no corporate media coverage of your story, state so directly and indicate a date as of which this was true. If your story has gotten some corporate news coverage, then identify what corporate news organizations covered the story, and when. In this case be sure to describe how the independent news story you are summarizing goes beyond the coverage provided by the corporate media. If you cannot see a difference, you may need to reconsider whether your story is actually a "censored" story.

REFERENCES Following the summary, give a complete reference for the story using the *Chicago Manual of Style* format. For example:

Almerindo Ojeda, "Death in Guantánamo: Suicide or Dry Boarding?" *Truthout*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/4511:death-in-guantanamo-suicide-or-dryboarding>.

See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/> for more details on Chicago style.

If your summary draws on multiple stories, give a reference for each one.

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S): List each student researcher's name and, in parentheses, school affiliation.

FACULTY EVALUATOR(S): List each faculty evaluator's name and, in parentheses, school affiliation.

* * * * *

Identifying, researching, and summarizing candidate stories will sharpen your critical thinking skills (including interpretation, evaluation, and explanation) and enhance your media literacy.

Project Censored posts selected Validated Independent News (VINs) online at

<http://www.projectcensored.org/category/validated-independent-news/>

These VINs are considered for inclusion among the top 25 stories in Project Censored's annual book. Online and in the book, we acknowledge the students and faculty who contribute VINs by name.

FINAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Candidate VINs must be submitted by Friday, March 30, 2018 to be considered for inclusion in *Censored 2019*.

Since 1976 these submissions have been Project Censored's lifeblood. We look forward to your contributions.