

KCS  home

English IV

English IV, Week 1

Creating Perspectives

We are not passive consumers of media; rather, as active participants we bring our own sets of interests, experiences, assumptions, and biases to what we read, see, and hear, as do those who produce what we read, see, and hear. When we care about an event, we want to know how to determine what is true about the event and how to get close to that truth. However, it is important to recognize our own filters - those personal interests, experiences, assumptions, and biases - and how they influence our ability to discern the truth. Media and government reports, like literary texts, need to be read or “decoded” carefully. The COVID-19 pandemic is our current reality and allows for real-world application of the ideas and skills presented in these lessons.

Students are asked to complete the tasks in the sequence presented.

Task 1: Essential Question (5 minutes)

Based on your current knowledge, write a response to this question: How do media sources influence our understanding of the truth and significance of an issue?

Task 2: Visual Prompt (10 minutes)

Look at the image below and respond to the prompt. [NOTE: This visual prompt can be found on the Cover Page of the unit.]



VISUAL PROMPT

Think about the individuals who lived in the homes flooded during a hurricane. What different experiences, stories, and perspectives might they have? How does the media distill a multitude of stories into a single narrative?

Activity 4.2 - The Evolution of Media

In this activity, you will read an article that traces the history of the media industry since the advent of television news. Through writing (and discussion if available), you will analyze some of the article's key ideas through various critical perspectives.

Task 3: "Vocabulary" (2 minutes)

Review the academic vocabulary word in the pink box on page 370.

Task 4: "What is the Media?" (15 minutes)

- Read Question #1 on page 370.
- Complete the graphic organizer on page 370. If you choose to use the COVID-19 pandemic, list 2-3 events in each box and try not to overlap events.

Task 5: "About the Author" and "As You Read" (5 minutes)

- Read the background information on Michael Griffin on page 371.
- Read "As You Read" on page 371 to prepare you for the article.

Task 6: Article: "How News Has Changed" (30 minutes)

- Read and annotate the article on pages 371-374.
- Remember the Essential Question as you read: How do media sources influence our understanding of the truth and significance of an issue?

Task 7: "Making Observations" (10 minutes)

- Answer the three bulleted questions on page 374.

Task 8: "Returning to the Text" (20 minutes)

- Return to the article as you respond to the questions on pages 375-376. Use textual evidence to support your responses.
- Answer questions #2 - 7.

Task 9: "Working from the Text" (10 minutes)

- Consider this sentence from the last paragraph of the article:
"As a result, more and more young people don't have a clear notion of the distinction between something that's a news article and something that's just an opinion piece."
a) Do you agree or disagree with the author's claim?
b) Share your opinion in a 1-2 paragraph response, making sure to support it with examples from your personal experience that either refute or back up the ideas in the article.

Task 10: "Language & Writer's Craft: Citing Quotations" (10 minutes)

- Read the information on Citing Quotations in the green box on page 378.
- For the Practice portion, add support to the paragraph(s) just generated from the task above (#9).

Learning Strategies

- Discussion Groups
- Graphic Organizer
- Note-taking

VOCABULARY

ACADEMIC

Media, collectively, refers to the organizations that communicate information to the public. A **media channel** is one method an organization uses to communicate, such as radio, television, website, newspaper, or magazine.

Learning Targets

- Explain how informational texts reflect or reveal critical perspectives.
- In collaborative groups, develop criteria and strategies for selecting supporting evidence from texts.
- Write an argument citing evidence from an informational text.

Preview

In this activity, you will read an article that traces the history of the media industry since the advent of television news. Through discussion and writing, you will analyze some of the article’s key ideas through various critical perspectives.

What Is the Media?

1. Take a minute to consider how you gather information about events that take place in the world around you, using **media**. Complete the following graphic organizer with information about current events and the **media channels** that you use.

School/Local Event	Details/Facts I Know About Event	Media Channel
State/National Event	Details/Facts I Know About Event	Media Channel
International Event	Details/Facts I Know About Event	Media Channel

As You Read

- Underline any specific references to time periods or years, and highlight phrases that help answer the question posed in each heading.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

About the Author

Michael Griffin, an associate professor of media and cultural studies at Macalester College, is a researcher, writer, and public speaker with more than 30 years of college-level teaching experience. Griffin, who earned his doctorate in visual communications and media studies from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, has worked as a documentary filmmaker and nonfiction editor. He's also written extensively on topics including the functions of media in society.



My Notes

Article

How News Has Changed

by Michael Griffin

What should we know about media history?

1 Many current concerns about the news can be traced back to long-term changes that began as early as the 1960s and accelerated in the 1980s, when media companies were bought by large conglomerates and chains, and increasing media concentration became a progressively larger problem.

2 In the middle of the 20th century, television network leadership believed that providing news was a public service. News wasn't expected to make money for national broadcasters. During that time CBS, for example, built up a high-quality news division, with distinguished journalists such as Edward R. Murrow opposing McCarthyism and Walter Cronkite, who became "the most trusted man in America," anchoring a highly respected nightly news broadcast watched by tens of millions. CBS also created foreign news bureaus around the world to inform the American public about international issues. It was referred to as the "Tiffany Network," alluding to the perceived high quality of CBS programming during the tenure of CEO William S. Paley. Network news was something that great numbers of Americans relied upon and could share; it gave them a common set of facts upon which they could have discussions and debates.

3 In 1986 CBS was bought by Loews Corp., then mainly a hotel and movie theater company headed by Larry Tisch. By the 1980s and 1990s these types of acquisitions were happening across the media industry, CBS and Tisch being just one example. Whenever a big entertainment company or conglomerate

My Notes

came in, the news divisions had to answer to shareholders and improve the bottom line. For the first time, there was an expectation that the news divisions had to make money, just like the entertainment divisions. And a major way to improve the profitability of the news was to cut costs. At CBS, cuts included the foreign bureaus, documentary division, and enormous numbers of people in the newsroom. This was an erosion of the concept and standards of quality news, and it happened **precipitously** in the 1980s and 1990s.

Then what happened?

4 At the same time, market segmentation was increasing. As advertisers began to analyze large amounts of demographic data, they were able to target their products and advertising more precisely than ever before. Everything shifted to target marketing, and that means the national audience got sliced and diced. That happened first with magazines: the demise of the national general interest magazines—*Collier's*, *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*—and the proliferation of thousands of little special interest magazines hyper-targeted to specific audiences.

5 Right after that came cable television. Instead of three channels (ABC, CBS, and NBC) dividing up a big, diversified national audience, cable TV came along and targeted narrow niche audiences. Instead of spending big money to reach a mass audience, advertisers could spend less money and reach the narrow demographics they were really seeking. The ad money moved away from the big networks, and the emphasis for news companies changed. News became just another commodity.

How did cable TV change news?

6 Cable television's new 24-hour news cycle brought major changes. It meant newsrooms didn't have longer periods of time to prepare content, check it, edit it, vet it, and then present it to audiences. Reporters were pressured to go straight to air with current events and any new information that was presented to them. That began to result in rushed and incomplete reports, inaccuracy, distortion, and misleading material.

7 If you believe the polls, there's now a real lack of trust in the media among the public. Some polls show that more than half of Americans don't trust the media to tell them the truth. But this distrust isn't something that only began in the last election cycle. This trust has been eroding slowly and steadily for 30 or 40 years. And it is going to take a long time to build up again.

How does target marketing change what we see online?

8 As a product of these targeted audiences, silos emerged. Silos create echo chambers, which characterized developments on television even before the web began to have a big impact. As the web opened access to the internet for a large number of people beginning in the late 1990s, it accelerated these echo chambers.

9 Everything about the way the web works—and the algorithms that track the patterns of your internet activity—reinforces the idea that there's a feedback loop that constantly redirects us toward what we're already interested in. It's a natural human quality to want your already-held opinions and perceptions

precipitously: dramatically

about the world reinforced. The web specifically caters to that tendency. It creates patterns in which we only tend to look at—or even get access to—information that confirms our already-held positions.

10 And all of that matches up beautifully with the niche marketing and target marketing that’s been going on for 50 years. What better information could advertisers get about your tendencies, tastes, interests, hobbies, and consumption patterns than what you’re doing on the web? This tells advertisers almost perfectly what they want to know about you, and it solidifies the silos that are already in place. This has gotten worse as more and more people are on the web, more and more of the time. And it means that the traditional media continue to lose ad dollars...

What has that meant for newspapers?

11 In the early 2000s, newspapers weren’t experiencing a significant readership dropoff yet, but they were starting to lose advertising money. Before the rise of the web, if you lived in Minneapolis and you were looking for a used car, you’d go to the Star Tribune classifieds section, the paper’s single biggest revenue source prior to the 2000s. When the web became more accessible, sites like Craigslist or Cars.com were more efficient resources. Who would still pore over the classifieds when you could just do a quick search online?

12 That was the first really serious blow to the traditional news media. When their ad and classified revenues dropped, the only **recourse** in their view at the time was to cut costs. By 2005–06, this was leading to massive layoffs in the newsroom. The newspapers became smaller, with fewer printed pages and less content. And then, not surprisingly, people weren’t as interested in subscribing. A death spiral for newspapers began to develop.

Did moving news online work?

13 When people tried to move newspapers to the web, they found out immediately that the print advertising mostly did not follow them online. As the newspapers were spiraling down, there simply was not the same number of reporters and editors doing serious journalism. There were blogs on the web, where lots of people were writing opinionated commentary, and aggregation sites that were recycling existing stories from other publications. But the amount of original reporting nationwide began to diminish tremendously. Reliable quality news reporting, as opposed to content re-purposing and commentary, was no longer being supported in the same way by commercial, ad-supported news media institutions.

14 Because of this, there’s no longer a model that most citizens in our country share for standards that news should meet. We’re getting more and more of our news online, and more and more of that news—in Facebook feeds and web browsing—is suspect in terms of its status as news. When someone on Facebook sends me a story, the first thing I do is see where it’s from. If it’s from someplace I’ve never heard of, then red flags go up for me right away, and I check to see what that organization is. But most people do not have a working frame of reference for distinguishing different types of news sources.

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Notice the following sentence from the section “Did moving news online work?”:

“As the newspapers were spiraling down, there simply was not the same number of reporters and editors doing serious journalism.”

On first reading, it may seem like Griffin’s use of the verb “was” does not agree with the subject of the sentence. But the sentence’s subject is “number,” not “reporters and editors,” so the subject and verb actually agree because they are both singular. It’s also helpful to remember when reading and writing that a prepositional phrase such as “of reporters and editors” will never contain the subject of a sentence, nor does it affect whether the actual subject is singular or plural.

As you write, be sure to reread your drafts with an eye toward subject/verb agreement—and don’t be thrown off by prepositional phrases that come in between the subject and the verb. If a sentence sounds odd, try rewriting it to make the relationship between the subject and verb more evident.

recourse: option

WORD CONNECTIONS

Etymology

Michael Griffin says that newspapers experienced a “**death spiral**” when online classified ads became a threat to print newspaper profits. The term *death spiral* originated in the early 20th century in aeronautical literature to describe the habit of early airplanes to slip into dangerous, downward spins that were difficult to recover from. Figure skaters named a challenging pairs maneuver “the death spiral” in the late 1920s before the term eventually made its way into business parlance to describe a swift and financially destructive sequence of events.

My Notes

Horizontal lines for note-taking.

prominence: importance

How is online news different from traditional news?

15 There’s not very much new original reporting on the web anymore, unless you go to the traditional news sites that are still run by traditional, respectable newspapers. We have fewer paid reporters than we did 15 years ago, and you’re not going to get the same kind of coverage if you have vastly fewer people doing the work. But websites still have to fill up their spaces with content—so what do they fill it up with if they don’t have verifiable original reporting? You see a decrease in actual news and an increase in opinion, commentary, and blogging, not to mention the vast quantities of frivolous entertainment-oriented content and click-bait.

16 In the online environment where information comes as a steady linear stream, where it’s not divided up with a front page, an opinion page, and different specialized news sections (that prioritize news information according to **prominence**, urgency, civic importance, or local, national, and international orientation), it’s all just mixed together. It’s a relatively undifferentiated wash of stories and information.

As a result, more and more young people don’t have a clear notion of the distinction between something that’s a news article and something that’s just an opinion piece. It’s all just “the next thing on the page” because they’ve grown up being online.



Making Observations

- What reactions do you have to this article?
- What ideas from the article stand out to you?
- What questions do you have after reading the article for the first time?

Focus on the Sentence

Use information from the article to write two sentences starting with subordinating conjunctions.

Before the rise of the web, _____

After the shift online, _____

Returning to the Text

- Return to the article as you respond to the following questions. Use textual evidence to support your responses.
 - Write any additional questions you have about the article in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
2. According to the article, what were some of the factors that contributed to the quality of network news in the middle of the 20th century?

3. How does the author characterize the quality of television news in the 1980s and 1990s? Use details from the text to paraphrase the description of news media during this period.

4. What effects did the changes to television news and the move toward online news in the middle of the 20th century have on newspapers?

5. What is the effect of the organizational structure used in Griffin’s article?

6. What is the effect of the author’s use of rhetorical questions in his article?

7. What is the author’s purpose? What is he trying to achieve by writing this article?

Working from the Text

8. Consider this sentence from the last paragraph of the article:

“As a result, more and more young people don’t have a clear notion of the distinction between something that’s a news article and something that’s just an opinion piece.”

Do you agree or disagree with the author’s claim? With a partner, share your opinion, making sure to support it with examples from your personal experience that either refute or back up the ideas in the article.

9. Use the guiding questions to analyze Griffin’s article through three different critical lenses (cultural, historical, and Marxist). Skim the article again and focus on gathering claims and evidence that fit each lens.

Guiding Question 1: What do changes in media coverage reveal about changing cultural perspectives of the news?

Guiding Question 2: How have historical developments influenced the role of news in America?

Guiding Question 3: How have economic or market factors affected news coverage in America?

My Notes

LANGUAGE & WRITER'S CRAFT: Citing Quotations

Documentaries, research papers, and other kinds of nonfiction often incorporate direct quotations to provide specifics about the topic. Direct quotations use a speaker's or writer's exact words, enclosed in quotation marks:

Example: The author explains, “[The 24-hour news cycle] meant newsrooms didn’t have longer periods of time to prepare content, check it, edit it, vet it, and then present it to audiences.”

Notice the term in brackets. When quoting a sentence with a pronoun that would be unclear to readers without context, you may replace the pronoun with its antecedent, and use brackets to indicate this small change to the original text. While this approach is acceptable, it should not be used very often.

Writers can also paraphrase speakers, citing sources while making the words their own:

Example: The author explains that newsrooms needed to produce content much more quickly, and with looser editorial standards, to keep up with the pace of the 24-hour news cycle.

Adding quotations to your writing is a great way to add color and alternate voices to make your writing more compelling and persuasive. They also help make nonfiction writing seem more authentic and less filtered through an author's voice.

PRACTICE Add support to your thesis statement from the previous page by citing one quotation and one paraphrase from the article.

✓ Check Your Understanding

What are some criteria for selecting quotations to support an interpretive claim?

✍ Writing Prompt: Argumentative

Use one of the critical perspectives to argue which of the following developments was most instrumental in catalyzing the changes in the news industry since the middle of the 20th century: conglomerates buying out media companies, the rise of cable news, the increase of target marketing, the decline of newspapers, or the rise of the internet as a news source. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant examples from the text and citing them properly. Be sure to:

- Include a clear arguable thesis statement.
- Smoothly incorporate quotations and paraphrased details from the article to support your ideas.
- Create cohesion by using an appropriate organizational structure and transitions.
- Write a conclusion that follows from your arguments and evidence.