English IV

Week 2

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English IV, Week 2
Constructing Public Opinion

In this activity, you will read two (2) articles about how we frame the media and how the media frames us. As you read and build knowledge about the topic, think about this Knowledge Question: *How does the media shape our view of the world, or how does our view shape our perception of the media?*

Complete the tasks in the sequence presented.

Task 1: "Opening Writing Prompt" (10 minutes)

- Complete the "Opening Writing Prompt" on page 380.

Task 2: "About the Author" and "As You Read" (5 minutes)

- Read the background information on Maria Konnikova on page 380.
- Read "As You Read" on page 380 to prepare you for the article.

Task 3: "How Headlines Change the Way We Think" (25 minutes)

- Read and annotate the article on pages 381-383.
- Remember the Knowledge Question as you read.

Task 4: "Knowledge Quest" (10 minutes)

- Answer the three questions in the orange "Knowledge Quest" box on page 383.

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

- Read "About the Author" on Matthew C. Nisbet on page 384.
- Read "As You Read" on page 384 to prepare you for the article.

Task 6: "Why Partisans View Mainstream Media as Biased and Ideological Media as Objective" (30-35 minutes)

- Read and annotate the article on pages 384-386.
- Remember the Knowledge Question as you read.

Task 7: "Essential Question" (5 minutes)

- Respond to the Essential Question (in the blue box underneath the image) on page 387.

Task 8: "Knowledge Quest" (10 minutes)

- Answer the three questions in the orange "Knowledge Quest" box on page 387.

Task 9: "Returning to the Text" (30 minutes)

- Revisit your annotations on both articles and answer questions #2-12 on pages 388-390.

Task 10: “Knowledge Quest” (20 minutes)

- Complete the assignment in the orange “Knowledge Quest” box on page 390.

My Notes

Opening Writing Prompt

Read the first few sentences of the article "How Headlines Change the Way We Think," and answer the following question in a quickwrite.

> **How Headlines Change the Way We Think**
>
> "Why Headlines Matter." "Misleading Headlines Can Lead You Astray." "How What You Read Affects What You See." "How Bad Headlines Make Bad Memories." "Eleven Reasons Headlines Are Important." "You'll Never Believe How Important an Accurate Headline Is."
>
> Those are all possible titles for this piece that I discussed with my editor. And, actually, the one that we picked may be the most important part of this article.

Why do you think the Konnikova suggests that the headline might be the most important part of her article? What purpose do headlines serve in an informational text?

As You Read

- Put a star next to each specific example of a headline used to support the author's thesis.
- 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

Maria Konnikova (b. 1984) is an author and journalist whose work has appeared in publications including *The Smithsonian*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New Yorker*, where she is a contributing writer. Following graduation from Harvard University, she went on to Columbia University to earn her Ph.D. in psychology in 2013. Konnikova's first book, *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*, is a New York Times bestseller and has been translated into 17 languages.

Article

How Headlines Change the Way We Think

by **Maria Konnikova**

December 17, 2014

KNOWLEDGE QUEST

Knowledge Question:

How does the media shape our view of the world, or how does our view shape our perception of the media?

In Activity 4.3 you will read two articles about how we frame the media and how the media frames us. As you read and build knowledge about the topic, think about your answer to the Knowledge Question.

1 "Why Headlines Matter." "Misleading Headlines Can Lead You Astray." "How What You Read Affects What You See." "How Bad Headlines Make Bad Memories." "Eleven Reasons Headlines Are Important." "You'll Never Believe How Important an Accurate Headline Is."

2 Those are all possible titles for this piece that I discussed with my editor. And, actually, the one that we picked may be the most important part of this article. By now, everyone knows that a headline determines how many people will read a piece, particularly in this era of social media. But, more interesting, a headline changes the way people read an article and the way they remember it. The headline frames the rest of the experience. A headline can tell you what kind of article you're about to read—news, opinion, research, LOLcats—and it sets the tone for what follows.

3 Psychologists have long known that first impressions really do matter—what we see, hear, feel, or experience in our first encounter with something colors how we process the rest of it. Articles are no exception. And just as people can manage the impression that they make through their choice of attire, so, too, can the crafting of the headline subtly shift the perception of the text that follows. By drawing attention to certain details or facts, a headline can affect what existing knowledge is activated in your head. By its choice of phrasing, a headline can influence your mindset as you read so that you later recall details that coincide with what you were expecting. For instance, the headline of this article I wrote—"A Gene That Makes You Need Less Sleep?"—is not inaccurate in any way. But it does likely prompt a focus on one specific part of the piece. If I had instead called it "Why We Need Eight Hours of Sleep," people would remember it differently.

Headlines quickly grab readers' attention and help steer them from story to story.

4 As a result of these shifts in perception, problems arise when a headline is ever so slightly misleading. "Air pollution now leading cause of lung cancer," ran a headline last year in the U.K. paper Daily Express. The article, however, said no such thing, or, rather, not exactly. Instead, it reported that pollution was a leading "environmental" cause; other causes, like smoking, are still the main culprits. It is easy to understand a decision to run that sort of opening. Caveats don't fit in single columns, and, once people are intrigued enough to read the story, they'll get to the nuances just the same. But, as it turns out, reading the piece may not be enough to correct the headline's misdirection.

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Sentence Variety

Varying the length and syntax of your sentences helps maintain the interest of your readers. Too many long sentences can wear your reader out, and too many short sentences can feel dull.

However, you can use a series of short sentences to grab the readers' attention. Notice how short the eighth paragraph of this article is compared to all the other paragraphs. It contains only two sentences that slow the reader down and help focus attention on the information that the writer is presenting.

As you write, think about how you can vary the length of your sentences to create variety, power, and emphasis.

My Notes

anomalous: unusual

5 It's these sorts of misleading maneuvers that Ullrich Ecker, a psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist at the University of Western Australia, was pondering when he decided to test how slight—and slightly misleading—shifts in headlines can affect reading. In Ecker's prior work, he had looked at explicit misinformation: when information that's biased influences you, no matter what you're subsequently told. This time around, he wanted to see how nuance and slight misdirection would work.

6 In a series of studies, out this month in the Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, Ecker had people in Australia read either factual or opinion pieces, where the only shifting variable was the headline. (He had his subjects read a total of four articles—two factual, two opinion.) One factual article, for instance, talked about a change in burglary rates over the last year—a rise of 0.2 percent—that ran counter to a ten percent decline over the past decade. The slight rise, the article pointed out, was an **anomalous** side note; the longer trend was what was important. The accompanying headline highlighted either the smaller or the larger of the two trends: "Number of burglaries going up" and "Downward trend in burglary rate," respectively. The opinion pieces pitted the thoughts of an expert against those of a layperson—for instance, one piece contrasted a citizen's concerns about the safety of genetically modified food with the opinion of a scientist from the fictional company Organic Food Science Australia. The headline focused on one of the two sides. In this case, it read either "GM foods may pose long-term health risks" or "GM foods are safe." Each participant read all four articles.

7 Ecker's goal was to test whether the degree of the slant would matter. With the factual piece, the misdirection was obvious—the entire piece was about a broader trend, with one tiny deviation. In the opinion piece, it was much more subtle. The article was, first of all, opinion, and each voice was given its own space; it was up to the reader to judge how the opinions should be considered.

8 After reading each article, the University of Western Australia students rated it on five different scales, to gauge things like interest and ease of reading. Once a student had read the complete set of pieces, she was given a surprise six-question quiz, with questions concerning both recollection and inference.

9 The headline, it turns out, had done more than simply reframe the article. In the case of the factual articles, a misleading headline hurt a reader's ability to recall the article's details. That is, the parts that were in line with the headline, such as a declining burglary rate, were easier to remember than the opposing, non-headlined trend. Inferences, however, remained sound: the misdirection was blatant enough that readers were aware of it and proceeded to correct their impressions accordingly. According to the study, "No matter which headline they saw, they predicted that, next year, the crime rate would go down."

10 In the case of opinion articles, however, a misleading headline, like the one suggesting that genetically modified foods are dangerous, impaired a reader's ability to make accurate inferences. For instance, when asked to predict

the future public-health costs of genetically modified foods, people who had read the misleading headline predicted a far greater cost than the evidence had warranted.

11 Ecker and his colleagues then replicated the results in a second study—this time, the discrepancies were between the headline and the image, rather than between the headline and the text. ...

12 For conscientious readers and editors, Ecker's findings across the two studies give cause for concern. First, misinformation appears to cause more damage when it's subtle than when it's blatant. We see through the latter and correct for it as we go. The former is much more insidious and persistent. It is also, unfortunately, much more likely to be the result of sloppiness or inconsideration rather than a deliberate effort to lead readers astray. Take this article from the Times in May. "Selling a Fake Painting Takes More Than a Good Artist," reads the headline. Alongside it: a photograph of a gallery owner who is not actually one of the culprits. A criminal implication is paired with a photograph, and the photograph may **inadvertently** be tainted as well.

13 Here's the other thing: almost every journalist has experienced the aggravation of having readers give aggrieved, enraged, dismissive, or, really, any other type of negative reaction to an article based solely on a headline. "Read the article!" the writer often wants to scream...What Ecker's work shows, though, is that with the right—or, rather, wrong—headline, reading the article may not be enough. Even well-intentioned readers who do go on to read the entire piece may still be reacting in part to that initial formulation.

14 If I had titled this column "Why Headlines Matter," I would be picking the broadest possible option. Next week, you might be able to remember that headlines are important but not be able to tell your friend exactly why. If I had called it "Misleading Headlines Can Lead You Astray," you might have forgotten the details of the study showing that we can actually overcome factually misleading headlines. "Eleven Reasons Headlines Matter"? More people might have clicked, but they might not have retained the information. It's not always easy to be both interesting and accurate, but, as Ecker's study shows, it's better than being exciting and wrong.

Knowledge Quest

- What is the author's main idea in this article?
- Which details from Ullrich Ecker's study stand out to you the most?
- What is your immediate impression about whether or not headlines can affect how you think?

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Integrating Quotations

Notice how Konnikova integrates quoted headlines and other quoted material in a variety of ways by varying the placement of the quoted portion in sentences:

For instance, the headline of this article I wrote—"A Gene That Makes You Need Less Sleep?"—is not inaccurate in any way. But it does likely prompt a focus on one specific part of the piece. If I had instead called it "Why We Need Eight Hours of Sleep," people would remember it differently.

"Read the article!" the writer often wants to scream...

According to the study, "No matter which headline they saw, they predicted that, next year, the crime rate would go down."

Varying the ways quotations are integrated keeps the writing from being dull or repetitive. Highlight each integrated quote on this page, and discuss how this variety in syntax affects the flow of the writing.

inadvertently: accidentally

My Notes

As You Read

- Underline the claim and star examples that the writer uses throughout the article.
- 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

Matthew C. Nisbet is a professor of communication studies at Northeastern University and serves as editor-in-chief of the journal *Environmental Communication* and senior editor of *ORE Climate Science*. Nisbet studies and writes about the role of communication, journalism, and advocacy in shaping discourse and debates over meaningful policy issues including climate change and income inequity.

KNOWLEDGE QUEST

Knowledge Question:

How does the media shape our view of the world, or how does our view shape our perception of the media?

Article

Why Partisans View Mainstream Media as Biased and Ideological Media as Objective

by **Matthew C. Nisbet**

July 21, 2011

1 We've reached a unique paradox in American political culture today: Both liberals and conservatives view the mainstream media as biased, yet tend to believe that their own ideologically-like minded outlets and commentators provide objective coverage. Claims of media bias have long been the lingua franca[1] of the conservative movement with the creation of rival outlets first in the form of magazines such as the *National Review*, then political talk radio, and culminating with Fox News and right-wing blogs.

2 Yet over the past decade, harsh criticism of the mainstream media has also increasingly **emanated** from the left with claims of biased coverage a fundamental core belief of progressive advocates working on issues ranging from climate change to social policy. In turn these same progressives tend to prefer the "objective" coverage at magazines like the *Nation*, blogging platforms

[1] A *lingua franca* is a common language used between people who speak different native languages.

emanated: originated

like the *Huffington Post*, and most prominently MSNBC which has positioned itself as the liberal counter-weight to Fox News.

3 Research in the field of communication has tracked the psychological under-pinning of this societal trend, explaining why partisans view mainstream coverage as biased but perceive their preferred ideological outlets as fair and balanced. In a recently published book chapter on the social psychology of political communication, my colleague Lauren Feldman and I review and explain this research, drawing in part on Feldman's own work in the area.

4 Here is an excerpt on media bias, from that chapter.

5 Across national settings, there is an ever **pervasive** belief in various forms of media bias. In the U.S., over the past two decades, the dominant belief regarding media bias is that the mainstream news media favor liberal causes and political candidates. Yet, when researchers conduct content analyses to search for systematic patterns of partisan bias in coverage of elections, across studies they are unable to find definitive evidence (D'Alessio D. & Allen, 2000). If social scientists using the best tools available to them find it difficult to observe hard evidence of liberal bias, why are beliefs among the public so widespread? Moreover, across country settings and issues, what explains the difference between subjective perceptions of media bias and objective indicators relative to coverage?

6 In research on perceptions of the news media, credibility is understood as a subjective assessment, influenced by the partisan or ideological background of the audience and the claims about bias that might emanate from trusted sources such as political commentators or like-minded friends. In the U.S. context, these claims are typically focused on a liberal bias charged by conservative elites and reinforce a widespread belief among conservative-leaning audiences (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). Audiences, then, do not typically assess story content on its own merits but rather on the basis of preconceived notions about the news media—often stemming from journalists' tendency in many stories to cover and reflect on their own potential liberal bias. A number of other studies have also suggested that individuals' expectations for bias in a news source or in the media, more generally, are likely to influence their perceptions of bias in news coverage (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Baum & Gussin, 2007).

7 Perhaps the most crucial determinant of perceptions of bias in the news, however, is the extent to which news coverage is seen as disagreeing with one's own views. Individuals who feel most strongly about an issue tend to see their own side's views as being more a product of objective analysis and **normative** concerns, and less influenced by ideology, than the other side's views (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). This human tendency translates directly to judgments about the media. In a range of studies, when news

My Notes

pervasive: widespread
normative: standard-setting

My Notes

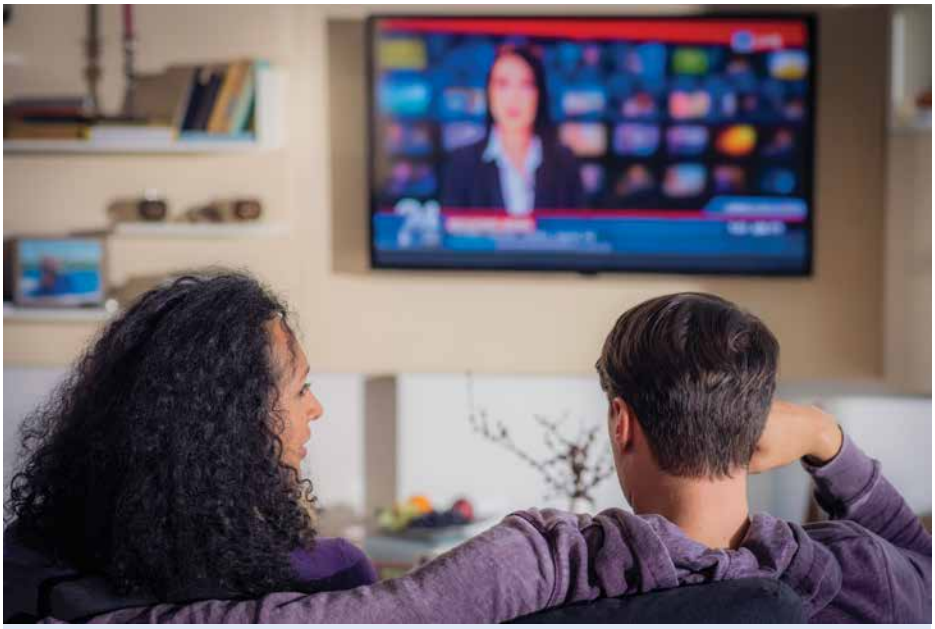
audiences who **hew** to opposing sides on an issue are given the same news coverage of the topic to evaluate, both view this identical coverage as biased in favor of the other side (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). The phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "hostile media effect." Researchers believe that the explanation for this hostile media effect is selective categorization: opposing partisans attend to, process, and recall identical content from a news presentation but mentally categorize and label the same aspects of a story differently—as hostile to their own position (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004).

8 The original hostile media effect assumes that news coverage is inherently balanced. The relative hostile media perception (Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001) relaxes this assumption, making it applicable to news that is slanted in favor of or against a particular issue. In the presence of the relative hostile media effect, supporters and opponents of a given issue perceive bias in a consistent direction (i.e., leaning toward one side), but each group perceives coverage as significantly more unfavorable to their own position relative to those in the other group. In other words, partisans perceive less bias in news coverage slanted to support their view than their opponents on the other side of the issue.

9 Interestingly, then, whereas the implication of the original hostile media effect is a partisan public perceiving media bias where none was present and thus potentially rejecting useful information, the implications of the relative hostile media effect are somewhat different. Of consequence here is that partisans will fail to recognize bias in news that is in fact biased, in instances when that bias is **congruent** with their pre-existing views. This bias against news bias is troubling. Americans' trust in news sources has become deeply **polarized** in recent years—with Republicans, for example, attributing more credibility to the conservative Fox News and less to most other news organizations than Democrats (Pew Research Center, 2008). In other countries, similar perceptions of a left or right bias to news or alternatively a bias relative to national or ethnic identity exist.

10 In each context, as news—particularly on cable TV and online—is infused with increasing amounts of opinion and ideology, this may make it even easier for partisans to validate their personal political beliefs—by accepting at face value information that comports with their views while rejecting information that advocates for the other side. Thus, the relative hostile media effect may not only reflect partisan divides in news perceptions but may also contribute to the further polarization of political attitudes and knowledge across political systems.

hew: adhere
congruent: in agreement
polarized: divided into sharply opposing sides



After reading the articles in this activity, respond to the Essential Question: How are media texts constructed to cater to an audience or to promote a particular agenda?

Knowledge Quest

- What ideas from the author's introduction stand out to you?
- What questions do you have after reading the excerpt the first time?
- What are your first thoughts about partisan bias versus media bias?

My Notes

Returning to the Text

- Reread the articles to answer these text-dependent questions.
- Write any additional questions you have about the texts in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

"How Headlines Change the Way We Think"

2. Is the use of short sentences, in the form of a list of rejected titles for the article, effective in the opening paragraph? Why might the author have opened her article this way?

3. KQ According to Konnikova's arguments, how does the headline frame the rest of the reader's experience? Cite details from the text to support your answer.

4. What does Konnikova mean by the phrase "Caveats don't fit in single columns"?

5. According to the article, why was the misdirection in the headline easier to detect for the factual pieces used in the Ullrich Ecker study than in the opinion pieces?

6. KQ What is the author's purpose for including the Ecker study in this article?

7. What is Konnikova's purpose for repeating the rejected titles for her article that she used at the beginning of the article in her conclusion?

8. Konnikova writes, "It's not always easy to be both interesting and accurate, but, as Ecker's study shows, it's better than being exciting and wrong." Apply this to what the article is trying to say about headlines.

"Why Partisans View Mainstream Media as Biased and Ideological Media as Objective"

9. KQ What is the difference between "mainstream" and "ideological" media? Why is their difference a paradox?

10. What is the meaning of *progressive* as it is used in paragraph 2? Use an online or print dictionary and thesaurus to confirm your understanding.

11. KQ According to the text, what is the "hostile media effect"?

12. KQ Compare the opinions of Konnikova and Nisbet toward the news media. Do they view journalists as generally responsible?

INDEPENDENT READING LINK

You can continue to build your knowledge about the media by reading other articles at ZINC Reading Labs. Search for keywords such as *media bias*, *confirmation bias*, and *hostile media effect*.

ZINC

Knowledge Quest

Think about how both authors explore media bias: the way media can shape a reader's perception and the way the reader's perception can shape how media is interpreted. Which do you think is more influential? Write an argumentative paragraph about whether the media or the reader's interpretation is more powerful. Be sure to:

- Provide a well-reasoned claim that is clearly stated.
- Use significant and relevant examples, details, or quotations from one or both articles that thoroughly develop and support your claim.
- Provide an engaging conclusion that supports the claim and examines its implications.