

## Article Presentations

### *Introduction*

You will be responsible for selecting and presenting an environment-related news article in one class during the semester. The goals of this activity are for you to:

- 1) Increase awareness of news coverage of current events related to the concepts we are studying.
- 2) Prompt discussion and debate among your classmates about these events.
- 3) Develop your public speaking skills.

### *General Instructions*

The article should be at least one page long and ideally longer. It should relate to the focus of the class during which you are presenting. For example, if you are scheduled to present an article during the class session focusing on biodiversity, you could find an article commenting on the discovery of a new species in the Brazilian rainforest. Pick an article from a reputable news source; see the news sources handout for suggested media outlets.

After you have selected your article, write three questions related to it that you would like the class to discuss. See below for examples. Post a web link to the article and your discussion questions on Oncourse per the instructions below. Then, prepare a 3–5 minute presentation that describes the highlights of the article. Power Point will not be available for this presentation.

In one class period, 1–3 students will present one article each. One student will present his or her own article and lead a discussion about it, then the next student will present, and so on. Each student will have up to 5 minutes to present the article and then an additional 5–10 minutes to lead discussion.

### *Deadline*

You must post the article and your discussion questions on Oncourse by 8 p.m. on the Monday before the week in which you will be presenting. So, if you are presenting on Tuesday, you must post your article by Monday at 8 p.m.; if you are presenting on Thursday, you also must post your article by that same deadline.

If you have difficulty posting on Oncourse, you can email me the article link and discussion questions before 8 p.m. and I will post them and/or email them to the class. I will not accept articles/questions emailed to me after the 8 p.m. deadline.

Oncourse will allow you to post your article and questions after the deadline, but you will lose points due to lateness.

*Article Posting Instructions*

- 1) Log onto Oncourse.
- 2) Go to **Forums**.
- 3) Select the link for the class during which you will be presenting.
- 4) Select **Post New Thread** from the top menu.
- 5) In the **Title** field, type:

“[Your name here] Article Selection: [“title of article”] by [name of author].”

Omit the external quotation marks. For example:

Gwen Arnold Article Selection: “Biodiversity in the Amazon” by Sally Mitchell.

- 6) In the **Message** field, paste a web link to the article. If possible, use the printer-friendly version of the link.
- 7) Below the web link, insert your discussion questions. (It is always a good idea to type them in a word processing program first, check for spelling and grammar, save, and then enter them into Oncourse.)
- 8) Select **Post Message**.

*Presentation*

Here is a general outline you should follow when structuring your presentation:

I. Introduction

A) Note the title of your article, the author, and the source.

1) Preview an explanation of how the article and its topic connects to issues we have recently discussed in class. You will talk about this in greater depth in a little bit.

2) Explain why you chose this article. (This may be the same as [1].)

II. Summary

A) Summarize the main points of the article.

1) Mention key data, statistics, and figures that will help the listeners understand the main points.

B) Summarize any conclusions that the article reaches/presents.

### III. Analysis

A) Put the article in context for the listeners by finding and presenting some additional facts, statistics, or examples that help illustrate the article's points (and which show that you have done outside research). For example:

1) If the article talks about water scarcity in the American west, you could mention whether other regions of the United States are facing similar crises.

2) If the article talks about genetically modified food policies being considered by the FDA, you could present some information about policies that European countries have put in place to govern genetically modified foods.

B) Note any questions you had when you were reading the article. For example:

1) Were there statements or ideas that you did not think made sense?

2) Were there conclusions or data that you did not find credible?

3) Were there points that surprised you?

C) Connect the article to issues we have talked about in class thus far. For example:

1) You could mention how the facts of the article support or undermine statements made in class readings or ideas we talked about in lecture.

2) You could note how the statements or conclusions of the article extend and elaborate on information from lecture.

### IV. Discussion

A) Present your discussion questions.

B) Ask follow-up or probing questions if the students are not responding to your initial questions.

*Grading Rubric*

There is a total of 20 points available for this activity.

<b>Article Presentation Elements</b>	<b>Points</b>
The article is related to the day's topic.	0-1
The article is from a reputable source.	0-1
The article and discussion questions are posted by the deadline.	0-1
The discussion questions lead to open-ended rather than yes/no answers.	0-1
The discussion questions are well written.	0-1
The discussion questions incorporate specifics of the article rather than being vague and general.	0-1
The presentation connects the article to topics discussed in the course thus far.	0-2
The presentation effectively summarizes the article's main points and conclusions.	0-2
The presentation incorporates facts or concepts related to the article topic and drawn from sources other than the article itself.	0-2
The presenter demonstrates critical thinking by noting questions she/he thought of while reading the article.	0-2
The presentation is articulate.	0-1
The presentation appears well planned.	0-1
The presentation is between 3 and 5 minutes in length.	0-2
The student facilitates class discussion by presenting the questions he or she prepared, prompting students in the class to respond to the questions, and asking follow-up questions to keep the discussion flow going.	0-2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

*Ideas for Discussion Questions*

Thinking about the questions below should help you craft your own.<sup>1</sup> You may be able to use some of these as models, fitting them to the specifics of your article. Or, in answering them yourself as you read your article, they may lead you to other questions that will prompt engaging discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> These questions are inspired by some provided by Dr. Gotthard, "Leading Article Discussions and Writing Critical Analyses" (guidelines given to students in the Spring 2008 session of Psychology 307 at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia).

- What is the context of the article? What research, policy decisions, laws, or events have set the stage for the phenomenon the article is describing?
- Why is this article being published now? What aspect of the phenomenon it is describing or the relevant political, social, or economic landscapes makes this article newsworthy?
- If you are describing an article that discusses research, what methods were used by the analysts? Do you think they are valid? Do you see any potential problems with them? Would you have used a different approach in this kind of inquiry?
- Do you think that the article is biased? If yes, what makes you think this?
- Are there potentially relevant facts or ideas that the article has left out?
- Are the arguments being made in the article substantiated? An article does not have to be an editorial to make an argument; generally, the “main characters” the article describes are making a case for or against a law, policy measure, or argument. Does the evidence in the article support these claims? What other evidence supports or undercuts the arguments?
- Who should read this article? Who (e.g., policymakers, the public, business owners) need the information this article is providing?
- Does this article make you want to take action? If yes, what could you do? What could others (e.g., policymakers, business owners, lobbyists) do?

### *Tips for Presentations*

These tips are drawn from my own experiences, but there are many online resources that can also provide you with advice concerning public speaking and presenting.

- Make sure you have noted the main points and their primary implications as feasible. If the article is long or complex, you will not be able to summarize every aspect. In that case, focus on the components that seem most interesting and/or important.
- If the article is describing research, note the general findings and trends rather than specific statistics unless you intend to critique the statistical methodology or research methods.
- Never underestimate the value of practicing your presentation. Doing this will allow you to check its length and also note any habits you have, such as saying “um” frequently or shifting your weight from one leg to another, which may distract from your message.
- If making eye contact with your audience members makes you nervous, look slightly above their heads.

- Try to pause instead of filling the airspace with throw-away words like “um” and “like.”
- If you make a mistake such as stumbling over words, correct yourself only if necessary to clarify facts and then move on. Do not spend too much time apologizing for a small mistake the audience probably barely noticed.
- You can read off notes when you are presenting, but be sure to look at the audience frequently. Do not glue your eyes to the paper. Ideally, you will be comfortable enough with your material to focus more on conveying the main ideas and less on the precise wording of the message.
- Do not be afraid to use gestures, but at the same time, don't rehearse them. Let them come naturally. When you are not gesturing, let your arms rest at your sides. Avoid putting your hands in your pockets, as this prevents you from gesturing. Also avoid hanging onto the edge of the lectern or clasping your hands in front or behind you.
- There are a large number of nervous habits people tend to display when speaking in public, including swaying, fiddling with shirt cuffs or other clothing edges, leaning on the outside of your shoes, and crumpling your notes. Have someone you trust watch you give your presentation and tell you if you have these or other tics, as you may be unaware of them.