

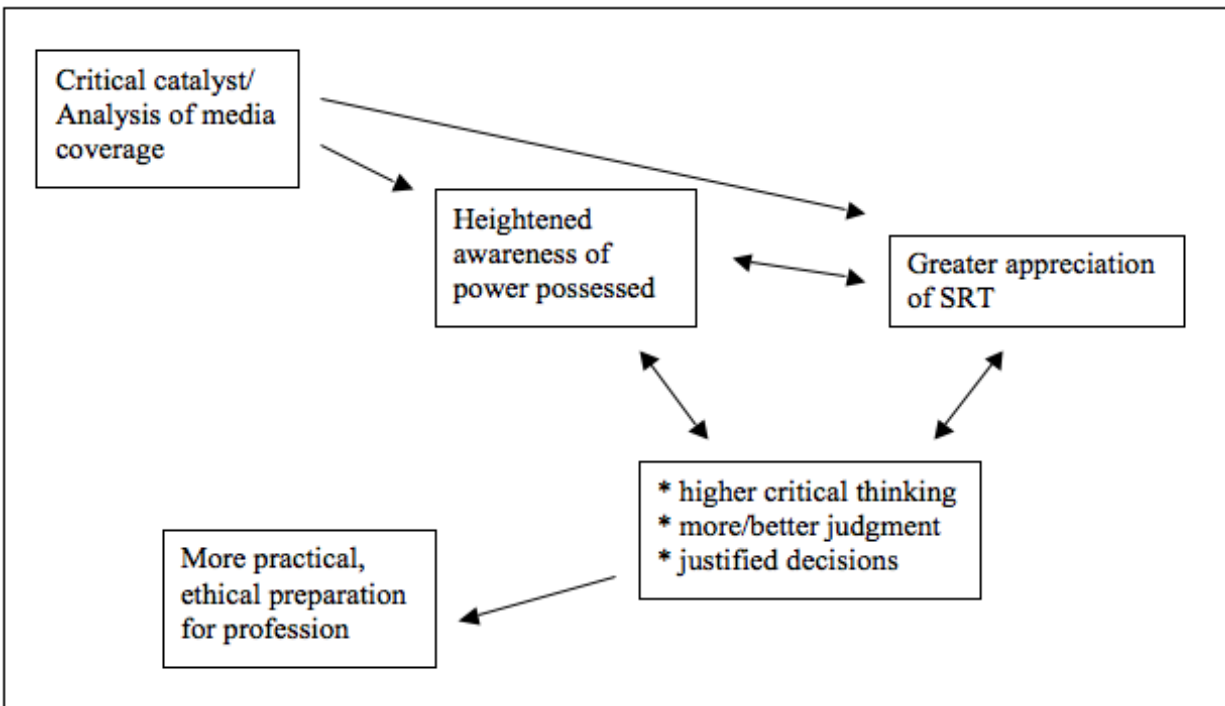
Student's Guide to Rigorous, Responsible Journalists: Applying Social Responsibility Theory to Media Praxis and Using SRT to Develop Individual Ethical Codes

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Lessons from the Arthur W. Page Center for Ethics and Integrity in Public Communication

Rationale and Overview

In a scholarly article (Cohen, 2001) about the future of journalism education, Loren Ghiglione, professor in the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, suggested that students have more opportunity to critically evaluate and examine the performance of news practitioners in order to better understand where professional responsibility must improve.



As the above figure indicates, this teaching module includes media analysis as a “critical catalyst,” that is a practical application of theory to personalize the power of the media so journalism students gain heightened awareness of the power they possess as media practitioners. Only by understanding that power in the first place can they appreciate the accountability and responsibility they have in association with Social Responsibility Theory (SRT). This lends to students’ improved critical thinking, news judgment, and justification rationale for their

decisions, all of which should address Black's (2008) call for more "rigorous, responsible journalists" (p. 31) and in the long term may even help restore the public's dwindled trust in current news professionals (Cooper, 2008).

Module Instructions

This module introduces you to SRT, requires you to apply it via media-coverage analysis of two international events, and invites you to use it in your individual code of conduct. To accomplish the objectives, you will complete the following tasks:

- Choose a U.S. print-media outlet to investigate;
- Examine the news coverage from this outlet of two international earthquakes;
- Finish the interactive-map exercise to learn more about these events;
- Read texts pertinent to SRT and observe its five tenets;
- Decide on your own perceptions of general media performance via the related exercise;
- Determine general performance of media from others via the related exercise;
- View select videos from the Arthur W. Page Center website;
- Evaluate news stories in your chosen outlets according to SRT tenets via the related exercise;
- Finish the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) exercise; and
- Compose your final paper.

Learning Objectives

In consideration of Black's (2008) call for more "rigorous, responsible journalists" who effectively blend skills with judgment in their careers, and in consideration of research that generally depicts present practitioners as ethically challenged (e.g., Cooper, 2008; Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007), it is prudent to examine current practitioners' social responsibility. Singer (2006) argued that SRT has become a normative goal, combining individual decision-making with accountability. Thus, aspiring journalists must have a chance to develop their personal, workable definitions of social responsibility as they enter the profession. The three learning objectives for this module are:

- To identify the evolution and the five tenets of SRT.

- To critically examine media performance of two related news events.
- To develop an individual, normative philosophy of SRT.

Key Concepts

You should be able to define the following terms by the end of this module.

- Ethical code
- Social Responsibility Theory (SRT)
- Hutchins Commission
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
- Earthquake classification
- Peer-review

Module Introduction

This section offers background information about the two international disasters chosen for investigation and how responsibility is delegated for subsequent examinations of news coverage. Also included are links to key websites that connected to module content and exercises.

Two International Tragedies

In this module, we will examine the U.S. print-news coverage that surrounded the Sichuan earthquake in China and around the Port-au-Prince earthquake in Haiti. The former occurred on May 12, 2008, had a magnitude of 7.9 on the Richter Scale, killed about 70,000 people, left 4.8 million homeless, and led to a U.S. government monetary donation of just under \$5 million (USAID, 2008). The later occurred on January 12, 2010, had a magnitude of 7.0 on the Richter scale, killed an estimated (although disputed) 316,000, left 1.2 million homeless, and led to a U.S. government donation of \$125 million (USAID, 2011). Both of these events occurred recently, resulted from natural disasters, and happened in international territory.

Project Setup

You will examine news coverage of these two events by one of four print outlets: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and *The Houston Chronicle*. Print was

selected as the medium of choice due to lack of access to broadcast stories as they originally aired, which meant it would be impossible to detect visual and audible cues. In this module, you will focus *qualitatively* in terms of your examination. In other words, you should be most interested in the story content itself in order to evaluate its ethical implications.

Media firms were chosen for comparative reasons, including that a preliminary search in LexisNexis Academic resulted in a similar number of “hits.” This was important because the class will be divided into four teams. Each team will read the stories generated from each outlet. For example, the team responsible for content from *The New York Times* will read 17 stories about the “Sichuan earthquake” in China and 48 stories about the “January 2010 Haiti earthquake.” The table below displays the breakdown. The quantitative output for these print-media outlets appeared consistent with the information depicted in the Tyndall Report, which “monitors the weekday nightly newscasts of the three American broadcast networks”: ABC, CBS, and NBC. The Year-in-Review data from 2010 indicated that the earthquake in Haiti was the second-ranked story in terms of number of broadcast stories. Conversely, the 2008 earthquake in China did not even make the list of top stories in that Year-in-Review report. It was suspected that print-media coverage would reflect a similar quantitative trend. These four outlets generated a reasonable, similar number of stories to examine.

	China: Sichuan Earthquake	Haiti: Jan. 2010 Earthquake
The New York Times	17 results (May 12-18, 2008)	48 results (January 12-18, 2010)
The Washington Post	16 results (May 12-18, 2008)	46 results (January 12-18, 2010)
Chicago Sun-Times	11 results (May 12-18, 2008)	54 results (January 12-18, 2010)
The Houston Chronicle	16 results (May 12-18, 2008)	36 results (January 12-18, 2010)

Readings and Video Clips

You are required to access the following links to complete all the online readings and watch all the video clips included in this section.

Ethical Codes

- Society of Professional Journalists: Ethics [code](#)
- National Press Photographers Association: Ethics [code](#)
- Radio, Television, Digital News Association: Ethics [code](#)
- Public Relations Society of America: Ethics [code](#)

SRT Text

- Press in America: [Hutchins Commission](#)

Public Perception

- Gallop Poll: [August 2011](#)

Arthur W. Page Center Videos

- John Curley: [Journalism Education](#)
- Gene Foreman: [Code of Ethics](#)
- Wolf Blitzer: [Accuracy & Fairness](#)
- Gene Foreman: [Taste & Sensitivity](#)

Earthquake Comprehension

- United States Geological Survey: [Sichuan \(China\) earthquake summary](#)
- United States Geological Survey: [Port-au-Prince \(Haiti\) earthquake summary](#)
- UPSeis-Michigan Technological University: [Earthquake magnitude measurement](#)
- UPSies-Michigan Technological University: [Richter classification](#)
- Kansas Geological Survey: Modified [Mercalli](#) classification

FOIA Assistance

- Environmental Protection Agency: FOIA [summary](#)
- USAID: [About USAID](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [About the CDC Center for Global Health](#)

Module Exercises

You will complete the following exercises to achieve the aforementioned module objectives.

Personal Perception of Media Performance

Related to SRT, in December 1942, Robert Hutchins along with 13 others formed the Hutchins Commission at the University of Chicago, whose goal was to generate a normative guide that articulated certain responsibilities the media had to the public. At that time, media comprised radio, newspapers, film, magazines, and books. The Commission's intent was to preserve freedom of the press as stipulated in the First Amendment but to establish accountability. The original text that appeared in 1947 is provided, however, the "Press in America" text offers a compelling summary.

Five tenets emerged from the Commission's effort; paraphrased here from the original text:

- Truth: that the media are obligated to seek/report the truth and help the public understand it;
- Balance: that media are obligated to report fairly, allowing all conflicting sides equal time;
- Accuracy: that the media are obligated to represent population groups honestly;
- Civic-minded: that the media are obligated to adhere to the goals and values of society;
- Accessibility: that the media reach out to the public and that the public can reach back.

Researchers have conducted a number of recent studies to study the public's current perceptions of the media. "In one recent survey asking opinions of various local and national media, not a single outlet was seen as credible enough for even 30% of the respondents to say they believed 'all or most' of what it reported" (Hayes, Singer, and Ceppos, 2007, p. 270). This same study showed that only 44% of Americans are confident in media accuracy and fairness (p. 270). An August 2011 Gallup poll (available in the Readings and Video Clips section) reported that 40% of those contacted had a negative view of the television and radio industry, a decrease of three percentage points from 2001. Unfortunately, this poll did not include the print sector.

In light of this research, we will conduct our own experiment: In general, how would you rate current media performance? The exercise works in conjunction with the five tenets of SRT with

a Likert scale for each. In other words, on a scale of one to five, where one means never and five indicates all the time, how truthful are the media? Contemplate each tenet in terms of this Likert scale. See Handout A for the entire exercise.

In the first portion of the exercise, you should consider your own perceptions of general media performance, but in the second portion, you are required to take this exercise into the field and find five people to interview. The reason behind this second portion of the exercise was to see if your perceptions, as aspiring public communicators, might be inflated compared to others'. This exercise and your results will be discussed in class. The discussion will focus on why people may have such a low opinion of the media industry.

To further complement the ongoing dialogue about responsibility, you will view four video clips, including two from the Arthur W. Page Center website: John Curley's "[Journalism Education](#)" and Gene Foreman's "[Code of Ethics](#)." The additional videos are Wolf Blitzer's "[Accuracy & Fairness](#)" and Gene Foreman's "[Taste & Sensitivity](#)." You will take an online quiz based on these videos after you have viewed all four.

Interactive Maps Exercise

You learned basic information about earthquake classification and statistics of these particular tragedies via the sites listed and linked in the Readings and Video Clips section.

After learning basic information about earthquake classification and the statistics of these particular tragedies, you will complete an exercise that requires you to investigate interactive maps of these international events to enhance your memories about certain facts, e.g., radius of shaking from the epicenter, access to healthcare facilities, and population displacement. See Handout B for this exercise that you will complete as a homework assignment.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Exercise

Another assignment related to information-gathering about these two events requires you to compose a letter that you could hypothetically send to a federal-government official in order to seek additional information about either earthquake event.

Before completing this exercise, review the websites for [USAID](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to learn about government organizations likely connected to the international earthquakes in China and Haiti. As you begin this exercise, think about this: What records might be available via these organizations that you could/would want to know?

Ten Sources and Evaluation Exercise

With this exercise, it is now time to evaluate the news stories. This exercise was created to guide you through the analysis process. See Handout C for the complete assignment.

Begin by reading two scholarly (i.e., peer-reviewed) journal articles about U.S. media coverage of these events. You will need to find your articles via a database search (suggestions include Communication & Mass Media Complete or J-STOR). Once you have discovered two usable articles, write a one-sentence summary of each. You will need to demonstrate how you knew each article was credible/scholarly.

For the remaining eight sources, include stories from your chosen media outlet. For each, identify the main angle and attempt to connect it to the five tenets of SRT. Now think about whether each story, in general, satisfied the responsibilities articulated in the theory.

Consider the following questions as you start to think holistically about the performance of your chosen print-news outlet in relation to its earthquake coverage in China and in Haiti.

- Based on your research, how would you describe your media outlet's performance? Where is it strong in terms of its social responsibility to the public? Where, or in which tenet(s), could it stand to improve?

- How have the five tenets changed, in your opinion, to adapt to our current media environment? In other words, which tenet(s) are harder or more difficult to apply to today's media market?
- As a budding professional, what will you (not) do in order to build and maintain a responsible rapport with your primary clientele—the public?

Final Paper

Throughout this module, you have examined news stories that surrounded the Sichuan earthquake in China (2008) and the Port-au-Prince earthquake in Haiti (2010) in order to assess the medium's performance of two similar events in relation to the five tenets of Social Responsibility Theory (SRT).

Your final paper requires you to synthesize findings (i.e., the news coverage of these events) along with scholarly sources and other materials to generate an informed critique: How would you describe the medium's performance? Where/in which tenet(s) was it strong? Where/in which tenet(s) could it stand to improve? This will comprise the research portion of the final paper.

On the first page, you should have a clear, obvious sentence that states your argument. This is your thesis statement, which needs to be boldfaced.

Then, based on the tenets of SRT and your findings, answer the two following questions: How have the five tenets changed, in your opinion, to adapt to our current media environment? As a budding professional, what will you (not) do in order to build and maintain a responsible rapport with your primary clientele, the public? This will comprise the reflexive portion of the paper.

Please format your paper with only your name at the top left of the first page. Center the title of your paper. The paper should be typed, double-spaced and include page numbers at the top right of each page. A references list at the end of your paper, using APA Style, is also required.

Refer to examples in both sections: the research portion and the reflexive portion. Specifically, have at least two in-text citations (in APA Style) to scholarly journal articles and at least ten in-text citations to news stories within the body of your paper. You are encouraged to consult and cite additional sources to further corroborate your thesis statement and/or reflexive comments.

Module References

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- USAID. (2008, August 8). *China: Earthquake*. Retrieved from http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/countries/china/template/fs_sr/fy2008/china_eq_fs06_08-08-08.pdf. Note: The report may be unavailable due to website revision.

Handout A

This handout comprises the Personal Perception of Media Performance Exercise.

Part I

Instructions: As a part of your introduction to SRT, consider the tables below in conjunction with its five tenets. In general, how do you rate current media performance? Complete this portion in class and be prepared to discuss your personal perceptions.

Truth: That the media are obligated to seek and report the truth and to help the public understand it. Are the media truthful in your opinion?

1 – never or at no time	2	3	4	5 – always or in every situation

Balance: That the media are obligated to report fairly, allowing all conflicting sides equal time. Is today’s media coverage balanced in your opinion?

1 – never or at no time	2	3	4	5 – always or in every situation

Accuracy: That the media are obligated to represent population groups honestly. Does media coverage accurately depict all demographics (racial, gender, age, economic) in your opinion?

1 – never or at no time	2	3	4	5 – always or in every situation

Civic-minded: That the media are obligated to adhere to the goals/values of society. Do media practitioners adhere to their constituents’ values in your opinion?

1 – never or at no time	2	3	4	5 – always or in every situation

Accessible: That the media reach out to the public and that the public can reach back. Are current media practitioners accessible in your opinion?

1 – never or at no time	2	3	4	5 – always or in every situation

Part II

This portion deals with the same idea as Part I, however, this time, you'll ask the questions connected to SRT to 5 people to see how their perceptions compare and contrast. You may choose the people, but at the very least, you should note their names and career titles.

Pay particular attention to similarities and differences among these 5 participants' perceptions alongside your own. Remember: You are an aspiring professional in the field of public communication. Are your views slightly inflated? Consider the backgrounds of those whom you ask. Might they have a reason to hold a(n) (un)favorable view of media performance? As applicable, make notes below each chart to qualify and/or clarify your participants' rationale.

Be prepared to discuss what you notice about the public's perception of media performance.

Name and Titles of Participants

Person #1: _____

Person #2: _____

Person #3: _____

Person #4: _____

Person #5: _____

Truth: That the media are obligated to seek and report the truth and to help the public understand it. Are the media truthful in your opinion?

	1 – never	2	3	4	5 – always
Person #1					
Person #2					
Person #3					
Person #4					
Person #5					

Notes:

Balance: That the media are obligated to report fairly, allowing all conflicting sides equal time.

Is today's media coverage balanced in your opinion?

	1 – never	2	3	4	5 – always
Person #1					
Person #2					
Person #3					
Person #4					
Person #5					

Notes:

Accuracy: That the media are obligated to represent population groups honestly. Does media coverage accurately depict all demographics (racial, gender, age, economic) in your opinion?

	1 – never	2	3	4	5 – always
Person #1					
Person #2					
Person #3					
Person #4					

Person #5					
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Notes:

Civic-minded: That the media are obligated to adhere to the goals/values of society. Do media practitioners adhere to their constituents' values in your opinion?

	1 – never	2	3	4	5 – always
Person #1					
Person #2					
Person #3					
Person #4					
Person #5					

Notes:

Accessible: That the media reach out to the public and that the public can reach back. Are current media practitioners accessible in your opinion?

	1 – never	2	3	4	5 – always
Person #1					
Person #2					
Person #3					
Person #4					
Person #5					

Notes:

Handout B

This handout comprises the Interactive Maps Exercise.

Instructions: Open the links below. Use the maps to answer the questions that follow.

- USA Today Haiti earthquake interactive maps
 - http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-01-14-quake-interactive-map_N.htm
- USGS (PAGER & Google Map) earthquake impact maps: China
 - <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2008/us2008ryan/#maps>
- USGS (Google) earthquake impact maps: Haiti
 - <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2010/us2010rja6/#maps>

Additional Resources

- Digital Globe: <http://www.digitalglobe.com/>
- Article on using Google Earth to view Haiti damage:
http://www.pcworld.com/article/186897/google_earth_reveals_the_devastation_in_haiti.html
- An annotated bibliography on Haiti written by the map librarian at the Army Geospatial Center: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a528274.pdf>
- CIA World Factbook maps and country information:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

Exercise Questions

Using the USA Today Haiti earthquake interactive maps, answering the following questions.

1. How many healthcare facilities/hospitals were located in Haiti according to the map?

2. According to the map of population density, what two highly populated cities in Haiti did not have access to healthcare facilities?

3. Aftershocks occurred in Haiti through what date?
4. Which city received the bulk of the displaced population seeking refuge from the epicenter area? Was there a healthcare facility located there?

Using the (USGS) PAGER earthquake impact map of China, answering the following questions.

5. How many people were exposed to the level IX shaking—considered violent shaking?
6. How many people were exposed to the level VIII shaking—considered severe?
7. What is the largest city in population in the earthquake zone circles? What is its population?

Using (USGS) Google Map earthquake impact map of China, answering the following questions.

8. What city is closest to the epicenter on this map?
9. Google Maps allows you to search nearby features: According to this map, how many healthcare facilities/hospitals were within 10 km of the epicenter?

Handout C

This handout comprises the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Exercise.

Instructions: Use a research database (likely Academic Search Premier and/or Communication & Mass Media Complete) to locate scholarly journal articles that examine and discuss media coverage of the Sichuan earthquake in China in May 2008 and the Port-au-Prince earthquake in Haiti in January 2010. Provide identifying information, the main assertion and evaluation rationale for each article.

Scholarly Journal Articles

Fill out the following information on each article and answer the corresponding questions.

Article 1

Database:
Article Title:
Author(s):
Journal Title:
Volume #:
Issue #:
Publication year:
Page number(s):

Main assertion: Write one focused, complete sentence that reveals something specific about this topic. Aim for something that you learned or something that surprised you.

Evaluation rationale: Write one focused, complete sentence that explains how you know this is a credible source. Hint: Look into the author or source credentials and determine whether or not the journal is peer-reviewed.

Article 2

Database:
Article Title:
Author(s):
Journal Title:
Volume #:
Issue #:
Publication year:
Page number(s):

Main assertion: Write one focused, complete sentence that reveals something specific about this topic. Aim for something that you learned or something that surprised you.

Evaluation rationale: Write one focused, complete sentence that explains how you know this is a credible source. Hint: Look into the author or source credentials and determine whether or not the journal is peer-reviewed.

Next, use a research database (likely Lexis Nexis Academic and/or Access World News) to locate and examine media stories in the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake in China in May 2008 and the Port-au-Prince earthquake in Haiti in January 2010. Indicate your media outlet / publication below and observe the precise duration given to you in class. Compose an annotated bibliography for these eight stories.

Your media outlet / publication:

For the annotated bibliography: Provide identifying information and the main angle for each news story. Then connect each story with the five tenets of SRT or as many that are applicable.

- **Truth:** Is/Are the reporter(s) truthful, providing facts (and not perpetuating opinions)? And do they, in your estimation, sufficiently help the reader/viewer understand those facts? Consider the presence/absence of definitions, clarifications, relations, descriptions, etc.
- **Balance:** Do/Does the reporter(s) include multiple perspectives? For example, you might consider the presence or absence of medical staff and victims. Do you notice just one source throughout the story?
- **Accuracy:** Do/Does the reporter(s) accurately depict all demographics? Or do you detect stereotypical representations? Look for overt *and* subliminal instances.
- **Civic-minded:** Do/Does the reporter(s) honor public values? Or violate them? For example, consider individual privacy as a value that we have in society. Now think of the Haiti news clip we watched in class. Was that an intrusion of the victims' privacy?
- **Accessible:** Is/Are the reporter(s) able to connect and/or communicate with constituents? Look for e-mail addresses, Twitter or Facebook accounts, etc.

News-oriented Stories

Fill out the following information on each news story and answer the corresponding questions.

News Story 1

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):
Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 2

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):
Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 3

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):

Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 4

Database:

Story/transcript title:

Author(s):

Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 5

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):
Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 6

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):
Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 7

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):
Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

News Story 8

Database:
Story/transcript title:
Author(s):
Publication date and year:

Main angle: Write one focused, complete sentence that describes the story's primary purpose.

Connect to SRT: Explain which tenet(s) apply to this story: How does each relate?

GOOD or BAD? Circle your evaluation of the story in consideration of SRT: How did it do?

Additional Questions

These questions will help you to start making some informed opinions and inferences for your final paper.

1. Based on your research, how would you describe your media outlet's performance? Where is it strong in terms of its social responsibility to the public? Where, or in which tenet(s), could it stand to improve?
2. How have the five tenets changed, in your opinion, to adapt to our current media environment? In other words, which tenet(s) are harder or more difficult to apply to today's media market?
3. As a budding professional, what will you (not) do in order to build and maintain a responsible rapport with your primary clientele—the public?