

Evidence and Experts

Estimated Time:

50 minutes

Overview:

Students identify key claims in their stories and gather evidence to support those claims. No matter what type of news story students are making, every story makes claims. For a news story to have credibility, all claims made need to have support with evidence.

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn how to support a claim with evidence in the form of expert testimonies, personal stories, statistics, and broll.
- Understand the importance of supporting a claim with evidence.
- Understand how to identify unfounded claims.
- Learn to identify who to interview for a news story.

When would you use this lesson?:

This lesson should be used as an activity after students have identified the main topic of their story and before they begin scripting and searching for experts to interview for their story.

Media Literacy Connection:

When producing media, the ability to identify the claims you make gives students a clearer understanding of how to create credible work. When consuming media, identifying evidence and unfounded claims will make students more savvy about how credible a news story, documentary, or any other form of content is.

Civics Connection:

Understanding the difference between facts and opinions and supporting a claim to give it credibility is essential for writing and speaking in a professional setting. Learning to identify a claim and the process of supporting a claim will help students become better speakers and

writers and better at identifying unfounded claims made by others. Recognizing when politicians make claims that are not supported by evidence is a key civic skill.

Vocabulary:

- Claim
- Evidence
- Expert
- Unfounded Claim
- Fact
- Opinion
- Statement

Materials:

- Projector for Activity 1
- [Evidence Chart Worksheet](#)

Activity - How information becomes news

Now that we have tons of interesting information from our curiosity research, we will focus on answering our story's central questions with claims, which are statements that need to be supported by evidence.

1. Pass out the Evidence Chart Worksheet. Tell students that they will fill out the chart for their stories after the class does an example together.
2. Play: [ZOOM Fatigue \(8 minutes or play first 5\)](#)
3. Using a projector or a front board, complete an example evidence chart as a class and prompt students with the following questions:
 - a. What is a claim the story made?
 - b. What evidence was used to support that claim?

Claim: Remote learning is causing Zoom Fatigue

Evidence:

- B-roll of students not turning on cameras, awkward interaction
- Interview with Dr Jenna Lee of UCLA describing the reward system in our brains
- Animation of the brain and reward system

Evidence that could have strengthened claim:

1. Interviews with students about how they are feeling?

Activity - Collect evidence

Using their pitch sheets and curiosity research notes, have students complete Evidence Chart Worksheet.

Before students start, review the following goals:

1. A balanced story that explores different possible answers to the central question. Remember that we only want to communicate claims that are supported by facts.
2. Different types of evidence available to use for your story such as:
 - personal stories
 - Images and videos
 - statistics
 - research
 - expert testimonies
3. Use different types of evidence to support your claims. If your story is about the negative impact of wildfires on student health, find a local pediatrician who can talk about what happens to kids with asthma, a personal story from a kid who has experienced health problems due to poor air quality, graphics that show statistics the expert or narrator may reference.
4. Closely review the data. Watch this [Student Reporting Labs video](#) about how to review scientific data used in a story.

Activity - Find an expert

If students have decided an expert interview would benefit their story, here are a few suggested steps to identify who to interview.

- Identify the **topic** of your story
- Do a search related to your topic, find at least 3 related articles. What data and evidence do those stories include? Does the data fit the story? What is the source? ([related video](#)). If you find someone who is especially good at talking about the topic, reach out and do a pre-interview [LINK]
- Look through Twitter and LinkedIn for people who are talking about your topic and might have deep knowledge. Make sure to check with your teacher before reaching out.
- Can't find an expert? Visit the website for a local or state university/college and look for the department head related to your topic. You can reach out directly through the website if possible, or through their communications/media relations department.
 - Example:
 - Search University of Mississippi -><https://olemiss.edu/>
 - Use the search bar and type "media relations" ->
<https://olemiss.edu/search/departments/media+relations>
 - Scroll down to "Media and Public Relations" ->
<https://marcomm.olemiss.edu/>
 - You'll find the name, email and phone number of the person to contact to get in touch with a professor or other expert at the university
 - Base your request off this template: "Hi, my name is _____, I'm a _____ student at _____ School and I'm doing a story about _____ for the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program. I'm hoping to talk with a professor at the university about _____. Here is my contact information, as well as my teachers. Thank you so much for your time."
 - Make sure to practice your request before sending it or calling, show it to your teacher for feedback

Wrap it up - Ask an expert

Discuss how curiosity, research and collecting evidence are three elements that are critical to journalism. Identify an expert related to your story and prepare for the interview by drafting questions. Prompt students by asking:

- Need suggestions for experts on a certain topic? Describe what you think your story is missing and who is in a position to help you fill in the hole.
- Are you having trouble describing why this story is important, get an outside perspective - a trusted adult or friend. Describe why you chose the story and ask if they would click on it.

If you can't answer "why should I care?" then move to another story idea.

Reflection:

Uncertainty can make you uncomfortable, but looking closely at claims is an important part of understanding the information we all rely on. What can you do to identify and question the claims you see on social media?

Exit Ticket:

What are the five different types of evidence you can use in a video story? In two sentences, describe how your story changed during this activity.