

ACTIVE LEARNING COMPONENT

News Judges: News Battles

Summary

In this follow-up activity to NLP's News Judges lesson, students compete to advance through levels of a tournament in which they pick a "roster" of news reports and face off with classmates to see whose stories are the most newsworthy.

How It Works

Make sure that all students remember the Big Four factors that determine newsworthiness. You might display them in some way so that students have access to them throughout this activity.

This exercise is structured as a competition between small groups of two to four students. (It can also be adapted for students to complete individually if you prefer, though this will take more time.) The competition is an elimination tournament in which student teams are given a set amount of time to select a "roster" of news reports. Teams then choose one of their selected stories for each "battle" or round of the tournament. Here is a step-by-step explanation of how it works:

1. At the beginning of the period, explain to students that they will be competing in an elimination (or "bracket-style") tournament.
2. Use whatever method you prefer to have students form teams. You will need an even number of teams in the class to make the rounds of the tournament work properly.
3. Review the basic rules of the tournament with students:
 - All teams will be given a set amount of time to find a set number of the most newsworthy stories they can find. (The number they need to collect is half the number of teams, plus two. For example, if a class with 30 students is divided into 10 groups of three students, each team would need to collect seven news reports.) The teacher sets the parameters for this search (which sources students may use, etc.). It is important that all students select only pieces of information that are straight news reports. (To review with students what distinguishes "news" from other kinds of information, see NLP's "InfoZones" lesson.) It is also vital that you set a time parameter, only accepting reports that were published or broadcast within a certain time frame. (We suggest one week from the date of the lesson.)
 - At the end of the research phase, student teams should submit their selections as a numbered list to the teacher. Then the tournament will begin. Student teams will be paired at random and face off in a newsworthiness showdown.
 - At the beginning of each round, the two teams tell the teacher which of their examples they would like to use, identifying their stories only by number to keep additional information confidential. (In the event that teams submit stories about the same topic, you should announce a tie and call for two new example numbers from the same teams.) After the links are submitted, open both examples in two browser tabs displayed on an LCD projector. (You might work ahead and get each team's submissions just before they are ready to face off.) The rest of the class should not know which team submitted each example, as they will be acting as judges.
 - As you display each example, talk the class through a quick general summary of it. Then call for a simple either/or vote by a show of hands: Which is more newsworthy? If you were an editor and could only publish one of the two reports, which would it be? (The contributing teams do not vote.)
 - The winner of each round advances to the next round, which is run the same way. This process is repeated until you have a winner.
 - Make sure students have access to the internet and understand where to collect their examples, then give them a set amount of time to build their collections. We recommend that you leave enough time at the end of the period for at least three groups to share their compilations.

An added benefit of this activity is that students practice seeking credible information on their own — and also get exposed to a wide variety of current events.

What You'll Need

- Devices that allow students to research and collect information they find online. These could be desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets or smartphones
- A timer or a timer mobile app (optional)

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Adapt and Extend

- If there is time, you can have a second tournament for teams eliminated in the first two or three rounds (with enough examples left to compete).
- Use the [Newseum's daily collection of front pages](#) and have one or more discussions about the news judgment at different news organizations.
- Have students count off, then assign each group a local news outlet and ask them to document the top stories (front page, home page, or the initial stories in a news broadcast) that evening. The following day, have students compare and discuss the similarities and differences.
- Challenge students' news judgment by asking them questions that deepen and complicate the subject. Should journalists judge each top story candidate individually, or should they consider their overall effect as a group? For example, should journalists ensure a mix of positive and negative stories? Should there only be one story about a given topic on the front page, or should there sometimes be more? How should lead photos be selected?