



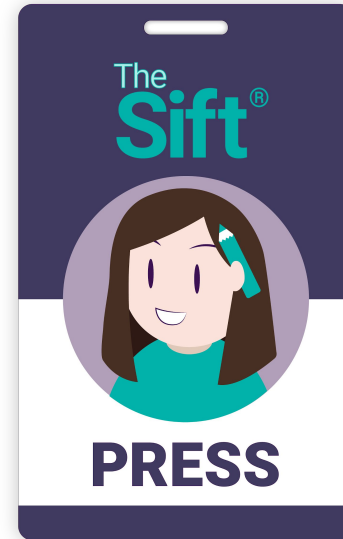
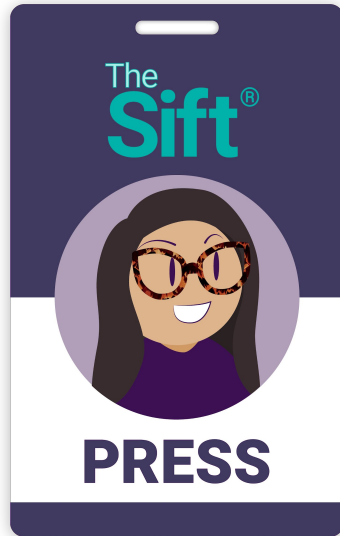
The Sift[®] News Goggles

Front-page editorial promotion in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Nov. 16, 2020

First things first

- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.

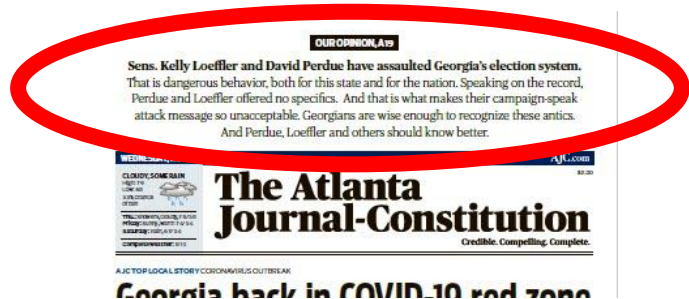


The Atlanta Journal-Constitution on Nov. 11, 2020, promoted an editorial across the top of its [front page](#) about two Republican senators who criticized “Georgia’s election system” but “offered no specifics.” The placement choice above the news organization’s name is atypical — and attracted [attention](#).



Here it is! Let's zoom in.

The placement also raises questions about how prominently opinion pieces should be featured. Let's take a closer look as we consider the differences between news and opinion as well as the role of an editorial board at a standards-based news organization.



OUR OPINION, A19

Sens. Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue have assaulted Georgia's election system. That is dangerous behavior, both for this state and for the nation. Speaking on the record, Perdue and Loeffler offered no specifics. And that is what makes their campaign-speak attack message so unacceptable. Georgians are wise enough to recognize these antics. And Perdue, Loeffler and others should know better.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2020 AJC.com \$2.00

CLOUDY, SOME RAIN
High: 79
Low: 68
55% chance of rain

Thu.: Showers, cloudy, 78/58
Friday: Sunny, warm 74/54
Saturday: Rain, 67/54

Complete weather: B10

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Credible. Compelling. Complete.

AJC TOP LOCAL STORY CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

METRO, BT
Graduation rates rise
Income metro districts

METRO, BT
Pollan, DeKalb counties
run smooth elections

INDEX
BANKING, A17
COURT, A18
DEVELOPMENT, A19
ELECTIONS, A20
HEALTH, A21
LOCAL, A22
NATION, A23
POLITICS, A24
SPORTS, A25
TRAVEL, A26
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ADVERTISING
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Reminder:

- **Straight news** coverage should be as fair, accurate and impartial as possible.
- **Opinion** writing generally is intended to share a specific point of view.
- **Fact-based statements** are “checkable” — you can check to see if they are true or false.
- **Opinion-based statements** cannot be proven right or wrong. They express beliefs, thoughts and feelings.

Ready? Let's go!



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AJC.com



What do you notice about this graf (journalist-speak for “paragraph”)? Do any words or labels stick out that indicate this is opinion? Try labeling each sentence as either a fact-based or opinion-based statement. Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

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Here's one clue! This label flags the front-page promotion as opinion. The "A19" tells readers where to find the editorial, on page A19 (the front page is generally known as "A1" in newsrooms). Let's pause and consider the word "our" here. Who do you think "our" refers to?

The "our" in this label refers to the editorial board of the Journal-Constitution.



What's an editorial board?

An **editorial board** is traditionally a team that includes veteran journalists in the opinion department of a news organization. This department is separate and independent from the news department. The board is seen as the voice of the publication's opinions, but its purpose is not to represent the views of newsroom staffers. Through articles known as **editorials**, this team shares opinions on major issues of public importance.

Note: Readers often confuse editorials and other opinion content with straight news reporting.



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When I was a reporter for local newspapers, sources and readers sometimes reacted negatively toward me because they disagreed with a recent editorial. But as a news reporter, I had nothing to do with any editorial. It is a common misperception that news and opinion mix in a newsroom, but they do not. This editorial promotion is on the front page, where readers don't typically find opinion pieces. Is this confusing?



At the Minneapolis Star Tribune, where I worked as a reporter, the editorial department and newsroom were physically separated on different floors. People sometimes accuse news organizations of partisan bias — of being “liberal” or “conservative” — based on the views expressed in editorials. In reality, the editorial board operates independently from the rest of the newsroom. In fact, I found out about the editorial board's political endorsements — an opinion piece where the board supports a particular candidate — at the same time that readers did: after publication.

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What do you think about this first sentence? Does it feel like an opinion-based statement or a fact-based statement?

Here's the key word that jumps out to me: "assaulted." This is an opinion-based statement. The editorial board is offering an opinion on the impact of these senators' remarks, and it's a characterization that others may or may not agree with. The degree to which Loeffler and Perdue's comments have "assaulted" the state's election system cannot be definitively proven right or wrong.

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What do you think about the second sentence? Do you think it is an opinion-based or a fact-based statement?

The word "dangerous" sticks out to me. Do any other words jump out at you in these sentences?

"Dangerous," "attack message," "unacceptable," "antics" and "should know better" make these sentences opinion-based statements.

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How about this sentence? Does it seem opinion-based or fact-based?

Yep, this is fact-based! This statement is “checkable” — we could check and see whether these two senators have ever offered specifics to the press or public that support their claims about the state’s election system. At standards-based news organizations, opinion pieces are still supported by factual reporting. Journalists writing for the opinion section follow the same standards of quality journalism as journalists writing straight news reports.

News Goggles: Next steps

Discuss: What do you think of the front-page promotion of the editorial? Is the fact that it's on the front page confusing? Are the opinions of editorial boards particularly valuable? Do they play an important role in shaping public discussion and debate in democracy? Why or why not?

Idea: Direct students to find a piece written by the editorial board of a local news organization. Then ask them: Where did you find it? How was it labeled? Could it have been labeled more clearly? Did the editorial support its argument with evidence?

Related:

- ["Journalists know news and opinion are separate, but readers often can't tell the difference"](#) (Kevin Lerner, Nieman Lab).
- ["About the Times Editorial Board"](#) (Los Angeles Times).

Resources: ["InfoZones"](#) (NLP's Checkology® virtual classroom), ["Understanding Bias"](#) (NLP's Checkology® virtual classroom) and [Informable®](#) (NLP's free mobile app).



This exercise originated in the Nov. 16, 2020, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).

Thank you!



A future founded on facts



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