



The Sift[®] News Goggles

Breaking news alerts on Breonna Taylor case

Sept. 28, 2020

Warning:

This activity includes information about a fatal shooting that some people may find disturbing.

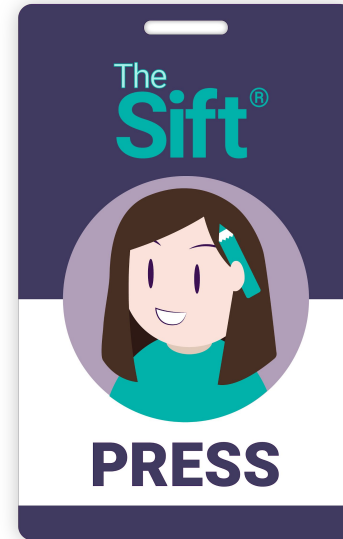
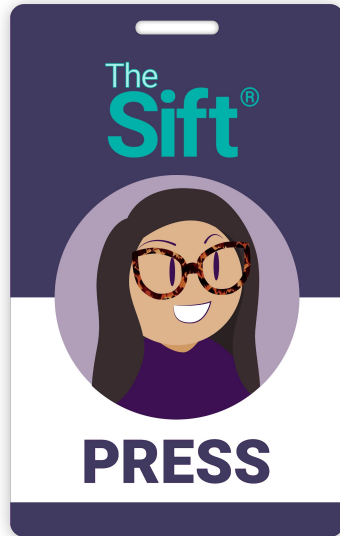


News organizations race to relay information to audiences as quickly as possible when major stories break. This week, we've selected a sample of breaking news alerts sent on Sept. 23, following the decision by a grand jury not to charge any officers in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky — and to charge one of them in connection with shooting into a neighboring apartment.



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.



What to look for

- 1. Details:** Which details do some alerts include, and others leave out? Which details do you think are most relevant?
- 2. Word choice:** How do the word choices compare in these alerts?

Download full annotations in [Microsoft Word](#) or as a [PDF](#).

Details



BBC NEWS

Wed 1:35 PM

Breaking News

US grand jury indicts one police officer over fatal shooting of black woman Breonna Taylor in her home in Kentucky



This is the only alert we noticed that mentions Taylor's race. Why do you think that is?



Perhaps it's because BBC News' audience is international, and may not be as familiar with details of the case, such as Taylor's race. A side note: News organizations carefully consider whether to mention a person's race, and typically only do so when race is relevant to the story.

Word choice



NBC NEWS

BREAKING: Only one officer of three indicted in Breonna Taylor's shooting death, faces charges of wanton endangerment




On the other hand, I could see why some readers may take issue with this word choice, perhaps feeling that NBC is suggesting that more charges were warranted in this case.




The word “only” immediately jumps out at us in this alert. We wonder what’s behind this word choice. Do you think “only” inserts an opinion or shows bias?




I’m not sure. Could it be that NBC News is calling attention to the fact that protesters and others have been pushing for charges against the three officers?

 NYTIMES Wed 1:36 PM

A grand jury indicted a former Louisville police officer for wanton endangerment in the Breonna Taylor case. No other charges were announced.

 WASH POST Wed 12:35 PM

Ex-Louisville police officer indicted on three wanton endangerment charges in Breonna Taylor case.

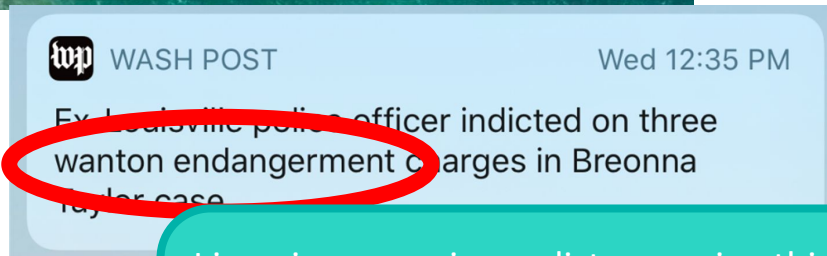
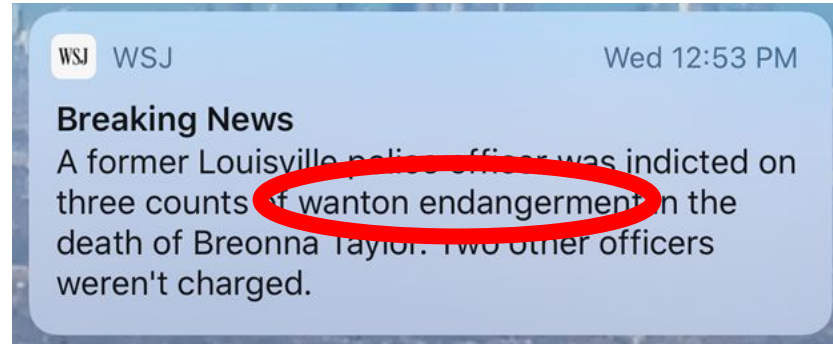
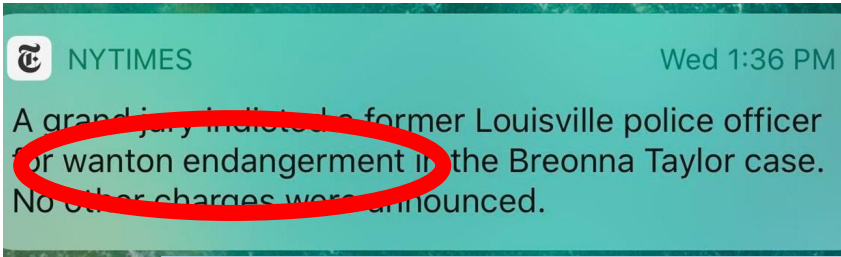
 WSJ Wed 12:53 PM

Breaking News

A former Louisville police officer was indicted on three counts of wanton endangerment in the death of Breonna Taylor. Two other officers weren't charged.



Also, I noticed that the Journal connected “wanton endangerment” to “the death of Breonna Taylor,” while the Times and Post linked it to her “case.” The wording of the alerts from the Times and Post is more precise to me, since the wanton endangerment charges are associated with the shots fired into a neighboring apartment.



I imagine many journalists covering this story tried their best to demystify “wanton endangerment” through additional reporting. That could mean reaching out to legal experts to explain the ruling in plain language. It could also mean turning to colleagues with deep experience covering courts or criminal justice. (Shout out to my former newsroom colleague, Dan, who fielded all my legal questions!)



I couldn't help myself and Googled “wanton endangerment.” I found this [legal definition](#).

News Goggles: Next steps

Related: ["How the media handled Wednesday's Breonna Taylor ruling"](#) (Tom Jones, Poynter).

Idea: Have students compare and contrast headlines of Breonna Taylor coverage from a selection of Sept. 24 [front pages](#) published across the United States. What details do some include, but not others? Which headline does the class think is the best? Why? If the class had to write a headline for this story, what would it be?

Tip: Be sure to guard against students' more cynical assumptions by inviting them to consider the factors that may have shaped journalists' careful decisions on elements like word choice, story placement, photo sizing, etc., on this sensitive story.



This exercise originated in the September 28, 2020, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).



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