

# SCIENTIFIC SOURCE EVALUATION: SHORT WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT



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COURSE:  
**ESSENTIAL BIOLOGY**  
(BIOL 115)



## SUMMARY

Students choose recent, biology-related news articles. In 200 words, they evaluate the reliability of the media source and content.

*“The aim is not memorization but to build interest in biology.”*

- Sarah Woolley

## GOALS

- Evaluate the trustworthiness of scientific sources
- Practice concise writing
- Stimulate interest in biology

## STEPS

- 1 Students each find a biology-related article in a newspaper or on social media for which they will evaluate the trustworthiness of the source.
- 2 Students post their choices to a myCourses discussion forum to ensure that each student works with a different article.
- 3 The instructor provides students with guiding questions they should address in their evaluation.
- 4 Students submit a summary of their respective article, along with an evaluation of the source material.

## ASSESSMENT

The assignment is worth 5% of students' final grade.

Marks are awarded according to two criteria:

1. Ability to apply course concepts to an argument
2. Ability to follow assignment instructions

Two TAs grade the assignment using a [rubric](#).

## READY TO TRY IT OUT?

HERE'S SOME ADVICE ...

This assignment is easy to implement if you:

- Gain student buy-in by being explicit about the goal and value of the assignment.
- Focus on the main learning outcome, i.e., the ability to verify the trustworthiness of information.
- Keep assessment simple.

## BENEFITS

- In a course that largely has exams with multiple choice questions, this assignment allows students a different approach to demonstrating their learning.
- Students develop critical thinking skills.
- Students' writing tends to be more focused because they've chosen problems that they're interested in.
- Students from all faculties take this course. This assignment can level the playing field for students with different backgrounds in science.

## CHALLENGES

Some students need to be persuaded that the assignment has value for their learning.

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