

# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

With every issue, CJR produces a study guide for journalism students to delve into the areas we've covered, providing topics for classroom discussion and additional activities to explore the ideas put forward.

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**1. THE SARCASTIC TIMES (pp. 12–14):** MSNBC's Rachel Maddow brings an absurdist approach to serious news.

- Does humor make news more accessible or trivialize it? Using two volunteers, or working in pairs, have one person deliver a report on a story in a sarcastic tone, and the other, in a serious tone.
- If Maddow is "joking to the converted," how do you think those with differing political opinions view her show? Is this a problem?
- Should reporters strive to maintain an objective tone politically, or is it better when commentators like Maddow or Bill O'Reilly are open about their political beliefs?

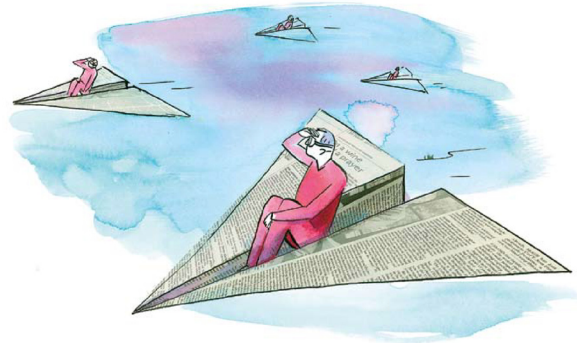
**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** **d)** Pick a news story and watch how it's covered on the nightly TV news (CBS, NBC, or ABC) and on Rachel Maddow's show. Which did you learn more from? Which would you rather watch? **e)** Find examples of 19th-century political caricatures and other newspaper humor. How do these compare with modern-day political cartoons or The Daily Show?

**2. ROLL THE DICE (pp. 22–24):** A foreign correspondent leaves newspapers to cover the world online.

- Is it a good idea to have many newspapers share syndicated coverage by an organization like GlobalPost? What are the potential benefits and pitfalls of this approach?
- If foreign news is so important, why do newspapers so often cut their coverage? Does the media have a responsibility to provide news even when it may not interest most readers?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** **c)** Go to GlobalPost.com and read the articles featured on its homepage. Does it do a good job of informing you about world events? Would you visit again? Who do you think would be most likely to sign up for a "Passport" membership to a site like this? **d)** Research a current overseas story by reading news sites in the country where the story is unfolding. What additional value would an "American voice" reporting the story have? If you were a foreign correspondent, how would you research and report the story to make it accessible to U.S. readers?

## In This Issue



What will journalism look like in the year 2014? With newspapers filing for bankruptcy and readership dwindling, some observers have wondered what the future holds for the press.

Yet there's still strong demand for quality journalism, demand that should only grow stronger as the media fragment across thousands of blogs and YouTube videos. To see how the news industry can adapt to the times, *CJR* asked eight innovators in new forms of journalism to imagine how their ideas might end up transforming the way we receive our news.

Their answers range from "crowd-sourcing" and other means of using new technologies to allow readers to contribute to the news, to bringing nonprofits and advocacy groups into the journalism field. It's a list of ideas that raises questions, as well: If newspapers and other old media disappear, where will blogs and "citizen journalists" get their basic information? And, perhaps most crucial, is there a business model that will enable the news providers of the future to pay for the kind of in-depth reporting that helps make for a healthy democracy?

**3. 2014: HOW WE GOT HERE (pp. 26–41):** Eight journalism innovators suggest ways to adapt in the digital age.

- a) Which of the eight ideas presented do you like best? Could some be combined to make them even stronger?
- b) Do you think reporting by NGOs like Human Rights Watch (pp. 29–31) would be as good as or better than that by traditional journalists? Would you be worried about conflicts of interest, or is this okay as long as the source is clearly indicated?
- c) Does reporting need more hard data, as Adam Davidson (pp. 32–34) suggests? Can stories on issues like finance present readers with too much data? What else is necessary to adequately explain a complex topic?
- d) If you were starting a nonprofit news Web site, how would you go about it? Who would be your target audience? To whom would you go for money?
- e) Can “citizen reporting” replace old-fashioned journalism to bring people important news?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** **f)** Visit nonprofit news Web sites like MinnPost and GothamGazette. Do these seem like good substitutes for traditional newspapers? **g)** Ask your friends and family whether they follow international news, and why or why not. Can news of the world be made more interesting, and should newspapers try? **h)** Read the Christian Science Monitor Web site, then look at back issues of the printed newspaper in the library. How has its coverage changed since it went Web-only? Which is more compelling? More informative? **i)** Write a pitch of a particular news story to an “objective” journalism site, then to a news site with a liberal or conservative agenda. How do they differ, and what does this indicate about how each site would present the news? **j)** Which of John F. Harris’s “Two Tents” visions seems more likely? Interview some working journalists and ask them whether they see sites like Politico as viable models for the future of journalism.

**4. GET OFF THE BUS (pp. 42–45):** A Web site brought together volunteers and professionals to report the presidential campaign.

- a) Are unpaid volunteers a good substitute for paid reporters? Will they be more accurate because of their access and passion for the subject, or less so because they may have their own agendas to push?
- b) Do you think that politicians will change their policies around access to campaign events to avoid “off-the-record” comments from ending up published by citizen journalists? Or is it impossible to keep information from getting out in the digital age?
- c) Why do you think trained accountants volunteered to check facts for OffTheBus’s investigation of Hillary Clinton’s campaign financing? Pick a news topic from today’s paper and discuss whom you would consult to fact-check a story on this, and how you would ensure that its information is correct.
- d) Michel writes that “transparency and disclosure” will be more important in the future than “neutrality.” If you were writing about an issue personally important to you, how would you disclose that?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** **e)** Compare OffTheBus coverage of an issue with an article on the same subject on Wikipedia. How does having professional editors in place of a shared “open platform” change what information is presented? **f)** Go to the Huffington Post Web site and read the “Bittergate” story that was broken by OffTheBus blogger Mayhill Fowler. Do you think this was reported well? How does it differ from what you would expect to read in a newspaper column? Write a list of questions you would ask Fowler to explain in her story if you were her editor.

## Quick Takes

Read these short articles in class and discuss:

- 1) **Craigslist = Straw Man, p. 8:** Do you agree that classified advertisers need newspapers even in the online age? What does this make you think of the Public Press Project’s plan to run Craigslist ads for free as a public service (p. 37)?
- 2) **Dutch Treat, p. 10:** Should newspapers get government bailouts like other important institutions? Write a short op-ed arguing against or in favor of media outlets taking government funding.
- 3) **The Companies They Keep, pp. 18–19:** What’s the risk in Fortune magazine showing only the good side of profiled companies? Do you think potential employees will be misled, or do they understand that stories like this are only PR?
- 4) **Luces in the Sky, p. 63:** How do you think journalists should report on new “super drugs” when they’re first introduced? What questions would you ask to guard against unrealistic claims by the pharmaceutical industry, without unnecessarily scaring consumers about genuinely useful products?