

Teaching with Current Events

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Selecting a Current Event or Issue

Current events to be used in the classroom can be selected individually by the students, as a whole group, or by the instructor. As you determine which events to include in your classroom activities, consider the following:

1. **Your goals and resources.** How do you want students to engage in the material? Do you have sufficient time to address a topic? Will your class be more conducive to discussion or assignment-based analysis? Do you need to teach a particular topic that is difficult to understand or that lends itself well to current event analysis?
2. **Relevance to your course material.** Do not include current events in your lesson plans just for the sake of doing so. Make sure the event you select is explicitly connected to the conceptual knowledge that you are trying to teach. You should be willing and able to justify the selection of the issue to students.
3. **The level of students and difficulty of the issue.** Choose an issue that is accessible to students based on their prior knowledge. You should select an event that is simple enough to use and critically analyze in a given class, but complex enough that multiple arguments can be brought in.
4. **The number of viewpoints the event raises.** Events that are best for discussion have at least two viewpoints that can be reasonably supported with evidence.
5. **Whether the event will promote debate.** Choose a topic that is relevant to your students; they will be more engaged in the process if it deals with an issue that affects them or that is salient in their lives. Remember that even controversial topics may not be controversial to the students in your class.
6. **Your comfort with the issue.** You should choose a topic that you are comfortable discussing in class and potentially assigning students a grade for. If you select a more controversial issue, be sure that you have an appropriate classroom environment to discuss the issue and that you are ready to respond to heated moments in the classroom.
7. **Whether it is interesting!** Your interest in or passion for an issue is often readily evident to students. Select an event that you find interesting, thought-provoking, and compelling for classroom use.

Why Teach with Current Events?

1. To introduce students to the nature of knowledge and debate in your discipline. The world around us shapes which questions are salient in our disciplines and influences the types of solutions scholars bring to bear on these problems.
2. To engage non-majors. Teaching with current events allows you to introduce higher-level concepts at a level of detail suitable for non-majors. This engagement fosters a greater interest in the subject and helps students to relate the discipline to other interests.
3. To teach to students of varying levels. Teaching with concrete examples from current events can help less experienced students understand theoretical concepts, while keeping more advanced students interested in the material.
4. To combat the tendency of novices to organize their knowledge into unrelated “chapters” of information. A project, paper, or discussion of current events can be used to help students review and synthesize previously-covered topics.
5. To develop inquiry-based learning activities. Inquiry-based learning has been shown to increase students’ motivation, promote a deeper approach to learning, and promote the intellectual independence.
6. To inform students’ decisions as consumers, future leaders, and citizens.
7. To expose students to culturally diverse concerns and viewpoints.
8. To model critical thinking. Applying disciplinary methods of analysis to “real-world” events creates student engagement with the subject matter and space to think critically about related topics.

Developed from points in Bondos, Sarah E., and Dereth Phillips. “Team-Teaching a Current Events-Based Biology Course for Nonmajors.” *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Education* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 22–27; McHale, Jeanne, “Current Events as Subjects for Term Papers in an Honors Chemistry Class.” *Journal of Chemical Education* 71, no. 4 (April 1994), 313-314; Prince, Michael J. “Inductive Teaching and Learning Methods: Definitions, Comparisons, and Research Bases.” *Journal of Engineering Education* (April 2006), 123-138.

For more resources on teaching diversity with current events, see online:
University of Washington Center for Teaching and Learning
“Discussing Racial Violence in the U.S.: Resources for Discussing Current Events”

Example Current Event Formats

The following are some of the (many) ways current events can be integrated into lesson plans. Examples from different disciplines are given, which can be adapted for your own use.

To Motivate Discussion: A political science course uses the 2016 election to provoke discussion about the role of political campaigns in American democracy.

In A Lecture: A chemistry professor is teaching a unit on molecular-level surface tension. To offer a visual example of the material, the professor shows a news report of a new technology that uses silica particles to help the shampoo at the bottom of the bottle flow out of the bottle easier.

Research Project: News reports suggest that more and more people are vaping, which some suggest may be used as a tool to quit smoking. A class of psychology students set up a small community study to determine whether vaping can actually be an effective smoking cessation method.

Debate: Some politicians and medical professionals have warned about the overuse of antibiotics in meat production. Weighing the evidence on both sides, students in a biology course hold a formal debate on the merits of legislation restricting antibiotic use in food production.

Case Study: Students in a sociology of race and ethnicity course track the Black Lives Matter movement as an applied example of racial identity and social movements in the United States.

Service-Learning: An anthropology course is examining the role of gun violence in their local community. Students in the course volunteer at the local youth center art program to see how children process violence in the community through their artwork.

Problem Sets: Math problems out of the headlines can be more engaging and tangible to students. An entire problem set on the mathematics of an oil spill allows a math professor to teach principles of volume, unit conversion, and rates of change, among others.

In-class Writing Assignment: A recent North Korean nuclear test generates a short writing prompt for a modern world history course on whether international conditions are conducive to the outbreak of war.

10 Tips for Addressing Sensitive Topics & Maintaining Civility

Adapted from The Center for Teaching and Faculty Development at San Francisco State University

1. Create a classroom environment that from the first day sets ground rules for discussion and makes it clear that all students are included in the work of the class. Make sure you make all students feel connected to each other, the class, and the topic, and establish strong expectations about the content and manner of communication.
2. Recognize the diversity of opinions and backgrounds of your students. Learning takes place from exposure to a wide variety of views. Be open to all perspectives, and ask students to voice their points responsibly.
3. Add a statement to your policy sheet or syllabus. Explain any material or topic you plan to introduce that is sensitive or controversial, so that students are prepared for potential sensitivity issues. Explicitly state the classroom norms for communication and dialogue, and provide students with a specific understanding about how to frame their opinions.
4. Be prepared. Even if you do not think there will be a reaction to an issue you raise, plan ahead what you will do if you encounter one. Know yourself and your own emotional triggers. Don't personalize remarks.
5. Foster civility in the classroom. Focus the discussion on the topic, not the individual statement. Don't personalize the exchanges or the comments. Foster an environment of debate and dialogue in which it is ok to disagree.
6. Protect all students equally during moments of potential conflict. Seek to draw out understanding and communication as well as opinions. Ask them to step back, listen to other opinions, and analyze why they feel the way they do.
7. Ask students to take time out for reflection. Assign a writing exercise about the issue as a calming follow-up to discussion. Or assign a research paper or essay, in which students must argue for the position with which they disagree. You can also stage a debate in which you assign viewpoints, perhaps asking students to argue a position opposite their own.
8. Use your office hours. You may need to discuss issues outside of class, particularly if a student has been emotionally affected by pointed remarks or argued stances. Help them learn from the experience, and to voice their own opinions thoughtfully and civilly by engaging in out-of-the-class conversation.
9. Acknowledge hurtful or offensive remarks. When student comments and/or actions are potentially hurtful, immediate move the dialogue to less personal examinations of why words can hurt. Ignoring the situation will leave other students feeling unprotected and victimized, and give tacit permission for the behavior to continue. If you are unable to find a workable position, let students know that this is an important issue and that you will address it later.
10. Know your rights and responsibilities as an instructor. If a student suffers from an emotional reaction or angry outburst because of a sensitive topic discussion, acknowledge it, and ask them if they would like to remain or leave for a while. If you feel the situation is serious, inform the University Counseling Center and/or call their warm line or emergency line if needed (574-631-7336).

INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org



Definition

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence is "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts." (Bennett, J. M. 2008. Transformative training: Designing programs for culture learning. In *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Understanding and utilizing cultural diversity to build successful organizations*, ed. M. A. Moodian, 95-110. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.)

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	Milestones		Benchmark 1
		3	2	
Knowledge <i>Cultural self-awareness</i>	Articulates insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g. seeking complexity; aware of how her/his experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description.)	Recognizes new perspectives about own cultural rules and biases (e.g. not looking for sameness; comfortable with the complexities that new perspectives offer.)	Identifies own cultural rules and biases (e.g. with a strong preference for those rules shared with own cultural group and seeks the same in others.)	Shows minimal awareness of own cultural rules and biases (even those shared with own cultural group(s)) (e.g. uncomfortable with identifying possible cultural differences with others.)
Knowledge <i>Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks</i>	Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Demonstrates adequate understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Demonstrates partial understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Demonstrates surface understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.
Skills <i>Empathy</i>	Interprets intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview and demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.	Recognizes intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview and sometimes uses more than one worldview in interactions.	Identifies components of other cultural perspectives but responds in all situations with own worldview.	Views the experience of others but does so through own cultural worldview.
Skills <i>Verbal and nonverbal communication</i>	Articulates a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings) and is able to skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.	Recognizes and participates in cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and begins to negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.	Identifies some cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and is aware that misunderstandings can occur based on those differences but is still unable to negotiate a shared understanding.	Has a minimal level of understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication; is unable to negotiate a shared understanding.
Attitudes <i>Curiosity</i>	Asks complex questions about other cultures, seeks out and articulates answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.	Asks deeper questions about other cultures and seeks out answers to these questions.	Asks simple or surface questions about other cultures.	States minimal interest in learning more about other cultures.
Attitudes <i>Openness</i>	Initiates and develops interactions with culturally different others. Suspends judgment in valuing her/his interactions with culturally different others.	Begins to initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others. Begins to suspend judgment in valuing her/his interactions with culturally different others.	Expresses openness to most, if not all, interactions with culturally different others. Has difficulty suspending any judgment in her/his interactions with culturally different others, and is aware of own judgment and expresses a willingness to change.	Receptive to interacting with culturally different others. Has difficulty suspending any judgment in her/his interactions with culturally different others, but is unaware of own judgment.

Inquiry and Critical Thinking Rubric

Students will learn various modes of inquiry through interdisciplinary curricula – problem posing, investigating, conceptualizing – in order to become active, self-motivated, and empowered learners.

6 (Highest) – Consistently does all or almost all of the following:

- Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Identifies the salient arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
- Thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view.
- Generates alternative explanations of phenomena or event.
- Justifies key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons.
- Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.
- Makes ethical judgements.

5 – Does most of the following:

- Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Thinks through issues by identifying relevant arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
- Offers analysis and evaluation of obvious alternative points of view.
- Generates alternative explanations of phenomena or event.
- Justifies (by using) some results or procedures, explains reasons.
- Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.

4 – Does most of the following:

- Describes events, people, and places with some supporting details from the source.
- Makes connections to sources, either personal or analytic.
- Demonstrates a basic ability to analyze, interpret, and formulate inferences.
- States or briefly includes more than one perspective in discussing literature, experiences, and points of view of others.
- Takes some risk by occasionally questioning sources or by stating interpretations and predictions.
- Demonstrates little evidence of rethinking or refinement of one’s own perspective.

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3 – Does most or many of the following:

- Respond by retelling or graphically showing events or facts.
- Makes personal connections or identifies connections within or between sources in a limited way. Is beginning to use appropriate evidence to back ideas.
- Discusses literature, experiences, and points of view of others in terms of own experience.
- Responds to sources at factual or literal level.
- Includes little or no evidence of refinement of initial response or shift in dualistic thinking.
- Demonstrates difficulty with organization and thinking is uneven.

2 – Does many or most of the following:

- Misinterprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Fails to identify strong, relevant counter arguments.
- Draws unwarranted or fallacious conclusions.
- Justifies few results or procedures, seldom explains reasons.
- Regardless of the evidence or reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest or preconceptions.

1 (Lowest) – Consistently does all or almost all of the following:

- Offers biased interpretations of evidence, statements, graphics, questions, information, or the points of view of others.
- Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counterarguments.
- Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view. Argues using fallacious or irrelevant reasons and unwarranted claims.
- Does not justify results or procedures, nor explain reasons.
- Exhibits close-mindedness or hostility to reason.

X – No basis for scoring. (Use only for missing or malfunctioning papers.)

Adapted from Stevens, Dannelle D., & Antonia J. Levi. 2005. Introduction to Rubrics. Sterling, VA: Stylus. 122-123.

Current Event Assignment Grading Rubric

18 Total Points Possible

Category	3	2	1	0
Summarize Content	Information from news article is clearly summarized. Introduction is comprehensive. Includes three supporting details.	Information from news article is clearly summarized. Introduction is clear. Includes two supporting details.	Summary may be unclear or incomplete. Only one supporting detail.	Too much information was copied from the article or important details are left out.
Connection	Insightfully makes multiple connections to science.	Makes appropriate connections to science.	Connections are not relevant or are in error.	No connections were made.
Validity/Reliability	Correctly identifies the validity of the source of the article and can defend the author's qualifications and/or reliability.		Missing either the validity of the source or author's reliability.	Validity/reliability not mentioned.
ACS	Correct ACS format and citation of the article	Few errors with ACS format or the article citation.	Many errors with ACS formatting or citation	Does not include an ACS citation
Style	Writer makes little or no errors in grammar or spelling. Every paragraph contains sentences that are well-constructed.	Writer makes very few errors in grammar or spelling. Most sentences are well-constructed.	Writer makes some major errors in grammar or spelling. Some sentences may not be well-constructed	Writer makes many errors in grammar or spelling. Sentences lack structure and appear incomplete or are confusing.
Attachments	Rubric and original article attached to the current event		Missing either rubric or article.	Neither rubric nor article attached.

Student Name: _____ **Points Earned:** _____

Oral Presentation Rubric for Current Events Project

Name: _____

Category	Exceptional (3)	Effective (2)	Developing (1)
Content	Shows a full and complete understanding of the topic.	Shows a good understanding of the topic but could use more detail on one or two points.	Shows a basic understanding of the topic.
Perspectives	Accurately and fairly explains all perspectives on topic.	Accurately describes the key perspectives on the topic but may lack detail.	Presents some perspectives inaccurately or without sufficient explanatory detail.
Preparedness	Clean and rehearsed presentation. Student can accurately respond to all questions about the topic.	Well-rehearsed presentation. Student can answer most audience questions.	Might have needed a few more rehearsals. Student struggles to answer many questions.
Audience	Uses vocabulary and examples appropriate for audience. Expands audience knowledge by explaining and defining new concepts.	Uses vocabulary and examples appropriate for audience.	Does not speak at an appropriate level for the audience's knowledge base.
Delivery	Appropriate volume and pace throughout. Confident presentation. Eye contact with everyone in the room.	One or two problems in clarity that do not impact the audience's overall understanding.	Audience finds the presentation difficult to follow.

Assignment Template

Title:

Description:

What is the context of the assignment in the course and the larger world? Why should students care?

Writing Prompt / Debate Question / Multimedia Assignment / Etc.:

Guidelines:

Resources:

These might include:

- *Two or three required readings that present different interpretations of the material*
- *A bibliography of recommended sources for students to do their own research*
- *A list of factual points for students to use in a class debate*
- *Primary sources such as photos or YouTube videos*

Rubric:

Attach to the assignment so that students understand how they will be assessed.

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