

Perspectives on Medicine and Public Health

**Critical Review Assignment—First version due on Session 11**

Scientific researchers whose findings have direct implications for ordinary citizens are often stymied by the challenges involved in bringing their findings to the general public. One traditional strategy has been to rely on magazines like *Scientific American*, the *New Yorker*, and *Discover* or newspapers like the *New York Times*. But what about the many ordinary people who do not read these publications or who simply skim the science articles because the vocabulary seems daunting? Are there other strategies that might reach a broader or simply a different audience? What about the web? What about the television networks? What about more personal outreach?

Our next assignment requires that you take on the unfamiliar task of analyzing and reviewing documentary video productions. The only similar assignment that most of you have completed is a book review. In this case, however, you need to educate yourself before you can write your review. You will also need to expand the range of features that you consider in your review to include sounds and sights as well as words. I have put together a list of 12 documentaries that focus on four topics of interest to researchers in medicine and public health. All of these documentaries were designed with the intention of engaging and edifying the general public. While these materials were originally presented in many different venues, you can now view all of them on the web. Pick a couple of topics that intrigue you; then, watch ten minutes or so of the videos associated with those topics before you choose the pair of documentaries that you wish to view in their entirety several times.

Each of the listed documentaries attempts to bridge the distance between the work of researchers and the interests and priorities of the lay public. The directors and producers have chosen different strategies, in part because they bring distinctive priorities to their task and in part because they make different assumptions about their audiences. As you review the documentaries, try to uncover the producers' priorities and their assumptions about the audience. In other words, what are they trying to accomplish and why have they chosen their particular strategy? What happens to the scientific studies as they are translated into a more accessible format?

First Version must be at least 1500 words long.

Revised version must be between 1700 and 2000 words long.

Comparison strategies:

- Articulate and defend a standard by which to evaluate documentaries and evaluate a pair of documentaries in the light of that standard. Or articulate and justify your concern about a potential downfall of popular documentaries, and evaluate a pair of documentaries in the light of that risk. Examples:
  - Clarity and accuracy of science
  - Effective use of visual evidence
  - Problem of oversimplification
- Identify differences between two documentaries on the same general topic, and explore their significance as a way of generating criteria for evaluation. Goal: to help your readers understand what characteristics make for an effective documentary on a public health issue.

Keep in mind that you will need to draw upon specific evidence from the documentaries and from the related documents. Your thesis will only make sense to your readers if you are able to root your observations and analysis in the specifics of your chosen documents.

**Two preliminary exercises due before first version of your critical review.**

**Critical Review pre-draft exercise #1** due Session 9

**Critical Review pre-draft exercise #2** due Session 10

**First Version of Critical Review due on Session 11.**

- Proofread and edit your critical review; then, write a letter addressed to your workshop partners commenting on the state of your critical review.
- Post your critical review and letter on the class website.
- Make **three copies** of both documents and bring to class on Session 11.

**Revised Version of Critical Review due on Session 13.**

- Post revised critical review on the class website.

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