Evaluating Media Coverage

Scientific evidence is based on observations, but media accounts often rely on inferences, conclusions or interpretations rather than evidence.

To evaluate an article critically:
Identify the source(s)
Respected scientist?
Reputable scientific organization or publication?
Peer reviewed journal?
Vested interest that would bias the claim?
Are any sources unnamed?
Is the information presented as evidence or inference?
Do others support the evidence or is this the only claim (or can you tell)?
Is the information or any conclusion presented logically?
Do the claims follow logically from the evidence?

Assignment:
1. Select three articles that address an environmental topic. One article must be from the popular press either recently published in a city newspaper (Seattle Times, Seattle PI, Washington Post, New York Times, etc.) or newsmagazine (Time, Newsweek, U. S. News and World Reports, etc.). The second article must be from a popular science periodical i.e. Science News or New Scientist. Science News is available through InfoTrak or on the web at http://www.sciencenews.org/. New Scientist can be accessed on the Internet at: http://www.newscientist.com. The third must be from a peer-reviewed scientific journal i.e. Conservation Ecology http://www.consecol.org/vol6/iss1/index.html

2. Write an evaluation of each article and address the following:
   a. What is the major claim made in the article?
   b. What evidence does the author present to support the claim?
   c. Is the evidence based on observations or inference? Give examples.
   d. Is the source of the evidence reputable and unbiased? How do you know?
   e. Is the argument for the claim, whether based on evidence or not, logical? Explain.
   f. Does the author rely on emotional or objective statements? Identify specific examples of language used in the article to demonstrate this.
   g. Based on the information presented in the article, would you accept or reject the claim either entirely or tentatively? Discuss.
   h. How can you determine the validity of information that is beyond your experience, or understanding?

3. Compare and contrast your evaluation of the three types of sources of articles.

4. Include a copy of each article with the assignment.