A comparative news analysis of one news story as it is reported on various national and international news sources

Why do this?
We've been talking about bits and pieces of arguments and other persuasive texts in class, and you've also been looking at and writing letters to the editor. Because we've been considering the rhetorical work of single texts, I'm asking you now to see what you can learn by comparing texts on the same topic. By seeing how different writings on the same topic shape how they present the news — including what they emphasize, include, or leave out — you'll gain a sense not only of a still wider range of persuasive strategies you can use in your own work but also a sense of what news sources treat you with the respect you believe is right.

What to do

FIRST, COLLECT YOUR INFORMATION

1. Meet with your partner at a computer with a reasonable Internet connection.

2. Go to the following US newspaper websites, and pick an international news story (political or economic) that is featured on at least three of the sites the day you meet. (Be sure to scroll the full length of the pages—and it is okay to see what further news is listed under National and International links. You may need to register on some of these sites to read the articles.)

   The New York Times • The Washington Post • The Los Angeles Times • The Christian Science Monitor • The Miami Herald • USA Today • The Atlanta Journal-Constitution [these were all active links]

3. From three of the websites on which the story was featured, print out the coverage on the news story you picked. (Print out a copy for each of you.) Choose three sites that approach the news differently, if possible.

4. Collect at least 6 other versions of the story, choosing two from each of the three following categories. Under each category, pick sites that approach the news story as differently as you can find. Print out each version of the story that you find, one copy for each of you.

   International news sites (in English)

   The Globe and Mail (Canadian) • India Daily • BBC News (British) • The Mail and Guardian (South Africa) • China Daily • The International News (Pakistan) • The Observer (UK) • The International Herald Tribune

   TV news sites/online magazines

   CNN • CBS News • Fox News • MSNBC • ABC News
blogs that are (primarily) about political issues
(you might have to do some searching to find what you need; blogs approach the news, um, a bit differently than 'traditional' news sources)

War and Piece • Andrew Sullivan • Crooked Timber • Obsidian Wings • Instapundit • Body and Soul • Tacitus • The Washington Monthly • Power Line

SECOND, ANALYZE YOUR INFORMATION
Together or alone, analyze the various stories, considering the following for each version:

• How would you characterize the ethos of the writer(s) of this story? How do you come to this characterization?

• What is the emotional tone of the story — and what emotional attitudes are you asked to take on toward the story, and the people and events involved? What specific features of the writing suggest this characterization to you?

• How does the ordering of events in the story ask you to consider what happened? (This is easiest to see when you compare one story with another.)

• How do you think the writer(s) of the story think of you, as they write? Are you smart and able to think for yourself, or do you need to be told everything, or...? Based on what features of the writing do you make these judgments?

• How do any photographs accompanying the story shape your understanding of the story?

THIRD, WRITE UP YOUR ANALYSIS
Turn your analysis into a judgment about what characteristics of a story make it seem fair (or not) to you.

On your own, without your partner, write a 4-5 page (1000-1250) word paper, in which you define the features of writing that make the writing seem fair and thoughtful to you, such that you feel respected as a smart thoughtful person by the writing and such that you can think well about the story. Use the questions from step 2 to help you determine which features of the writing to emphasize.

Start your writing with a statement summarizing the features you think are most important, and then use the rest of the paper to give evidence from the stories. (At the end of your writing, be sure to cite your sources, using the MLA or APA format.)