

Example of Formative Assessment from Journalism/Online News Class

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The 3 lesson plans, [Class Activity #1, Search Engine Optimization](#), [Rewrite Old Nevarmore Headlines](#), and [Sample Headlines](#) illustrate the use of formative assessment in my classroom. Since it is an online news course, I host the class assignments on my blog and post links to them on the Ravenscroft website. The link to the actual webpage is provided beneath each lesson plan.

Each student completes the first activity individually. Once they are through, students take turns using the teacher's computer to talk about the particular story they chose and their observations about the differences in presentation of information of the same story on a home page as opposed to the print version. I make bullet points on the white board as each student leads the class through their two versions of the same article.

Then, as a group, we go to the explanation of the strategy involved in online journalism by referring to the [Search Engine Optimization](#) webpage. We compare words by using Google Analytics so the students can better understand word choice in online news. Students suggest words like Cardinal Gibbons and Ravenscroft so they can see which school is searched more by Google users. The reason it is important is that if one is searched at a higher frequency than the other, it should be the first word in the headline to improve the chances of landing on the first page of the Google search results. So, if Ravenscroft defeats Gibbons but the word Gibbons is a more popular key word used in searches, the headline should read Gibbons defeated by Ravenscroft. Then they could compare words like defeat and loses, etc. to compose the headline with the highest appeal to search engines.

After these two lessons, the students move to the summative assessment named [Rewrite Old Nevarmore Headlines](#). They must make notes as they use Google Analytics to choose words to use in their headlines and explain the process below each new headline that they create. They are given two class periods to complete the assignment. At the beginning of the second class period, I display a list of the headlines they created the previous day ([Sample Headlines](#)). Their headlines are cut and pasted with no names displayed. We take the first ten minutes of class to read them aloud and look at the key words used. I point out that some students only chose to change one word while others changed several. Then, I explain that in order to get full credit for each headline, more than one word needs to be changed because the more key words used in an online headline, the greater the chance of the article landing on the first page of the search results page. They have the rest of the class period to make any adjustments to their work prior to being graded as a summative assessment.

Class Activity #1

Basic news writing concepts certainly apply to *Nevermore Online* as well as the printed *Nevermore*. Let's take a look at the difference in **presentation** of the information for the same headline as well as the article as it appears on the home page of [*The Washington Post Online*](#) in contrast to the actual full version of the headline and article that appears in the printed version of [*The Washington Post*](#). You can access the full article by simply clicking on the headline above the summary.

Activity:

- Please read any headline and story summary that interests you on the home page of [*The Washington Post*](#) website.
- Please click on the headline of the summary you choose to read and read the full article that pops up as a result.
- Be prepared to discuss the differences you notice between the headline that appears on the front page with the headline used in the actual printed article after you finished reading the full version.
- Also, take a close look at the summary of the article used on the front page and compare it with the actual lead in the full version of the printed article. Be prepared to discuss any similarities or differences you noticed between the two upon completion.

Link to class assignment webpage: <http://hvelk.wordpress.com/intronevarmore-online/class-activity-1/>

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

We all use search engines as we look for information on the vast, tangled world-wide web. Search engines save us time and frustration in our pursuit of information online. They make the internet much more user-friendly. They also sort and rank the information we are looking for in an effort to provide us with the most relevant/useful web sites about our topic. Because they are so efficient and effective in their rankings, people rarely look beyond the first page of search results as they decide which sites to visit. As a producer of online news, can you see the importance of understanding how these search engines work and how we can use them to optimize our placement on a search engine results page?

Definitions of key terms:

Search Engine Optimization - Strategies and tactics undertaken to improve web pages so they gain a higher ranking in the search engines. Definition from searchenginegenie.com
<http://bit.ly/c8MOK5>

Spiders - Googles' name for its **Web crawler** (a computer program that browses the [World Wide Web](#) in a methodical, automated manner or in an orderly fashion.) This process is called *Web crawling* or *spidering* because these programs go through web sites as a means of providing up-to-date data. Web crawlers are mainly used to create a copy of all the visited pages for later processing by a search engine that will [index](#) the downloaded pages to provide fast searches. Crawlers can also be used for automating maintenance tasks on a Web site, such as checking links or validating [HTML](#) code. Also, crawlers can be used to gather specific types of information from Web pages, such as harvesting e-mail addresses (usually for spam).
(Definition from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_crawler)

Key Word Density - Keyword density is the percentage of times a keyword or phrase appears on a web page compared to the total number of words on the page. In the context of [search engine optimization](#) keyword density can be used as a factor in determining whether a web page is relevant to a specified keyword or keyword phrase. (Definition from Wikipedia
<http://bit.ly/HaksE>)

Critical Factors for SEO for Online News

Headlines - No more than 60 characters will be displayed through a search engine such as Google. So, headlines must be concise, complete and clear with key words visible. The more key words your headline uses, the higher your ranking will be. Use key words that your audience/readers think are important in regard to the story. Emphasize nouns over verbs and adjectives; unlike traditional news writing where strong verbs are emphasized.

Summary - More promotional than traditional news lead and also uses key words, names attribution, and location and time elements.

KEY TOOL FOR HEADLINE/SUMMARY CREATION – GOOGLE INSIGHTS FOR SEARCH Google provides a web page that allows you to compare different words in regard to their SEO significance. For example, you can search two different words such as frequency compared to update to see which term most people use in their searches. The results will help you create the optimal headline for your online news story. You can visit this site by clicking on this link: <http://www.google.com/insights/search/#>

Link to Search Engine Optimization webpage: <http://hvelk.wordpress.com/intronevarmore-online/seo/>

Rewrite Old Nevarmore Headlines

In this exercise, you will practice converting traditional print news headlines to online new headlines keeping search engine optimization in mind. Please use Google Insights for Search (<http://www.google.com/insights/search/#>) when crafting your new online headlines.

- Under each new headline, please note the rationale behind each new online headline. List words that you considered using and the reason that you chose to use the particular words used in the final version of your online headline.
- Remember – NO MORE THAN 60 CHARACTERS
- DEADLINE – you have two class periods to complete this exercise.
- Please save your new online headlines in the public folder mentioned above. Title your saved Word document as follows: Name/Online Headlines>Date

From the October '09 Issue (follow link: <http://bit.ly/aSCfaR>)

1. Free flu shots children K-12 at Ravenscroft (Front page)
2. Sophomore girl-next-door chasing her dream (Page 12)
3. Hellman and Bernhardt hit a high note as they sing their way onto the North Carolina Master Chorale (Page 13)

From the November '09 Issue (follow link: <http://bit.ly/coKX8Y>)

1. Traffic jam on Veracross information highway slows report card availability (Front page)
2. New Raven Wesley Frazier races into the spotlight (Page 19)

From the January '10 Issue (follow link: <http://bit.ly/bRehyd>)

1. Welsh's advisory group collects second canned food competition title (Page 2)
2. Parking lot transformed into garden oasis on campus (Page 2)
3. Simultaneous beginnings result in mediocre ends (Page 7)
4. Michael Jackson: Behind the music lies a talented team (Page 9)

From the May '10 Issue (follow link: <http://bit.ly/bLxhrv>)

1. Day of Silence sends loud message (Front page)
 2. Existing Precalculus course to be classified as an Honors class next year (Front page)
- Link to Rewrite Old Nevarmore Headlines assignment:** <http://hvelk.wordpress.com/intronevarmore-online/headlines/>

Sample Headlines

1. Free flu shots children K-12 at Ravenscroft (Front page)

School Offers Free Flu Vaccine

- A. Free flu shots for students
- B. Free flu shots children K-12 at Ravenscroft
- C. Students had more hits

Free flu shots children K-12 at Ravenscroft

- Students receive free flu shots.
- Students had more hits than children

Free flu shots children K-12 at Ravenscroft

1. Free Flu shots for students at Ravenscroft: students gets more hits than original

1. Free flu shots children K-12 at Ravenscroft
 - a. Ravenscroft

1. **Free Flu Shots to Children K-12 at Ravenscroft → “Free Flu Shots to All Students at Ravenscroft” – “all” got many more hits than “K-12”**

Ravenscroft vs. school, students vs. children, shot vs. vaccine

1. Traffic jam on Veracross information highway slows report card availability → “Information Highway Veracross slows report card availability” – I put “information highway” first because it was more popular than “Veracross,” but Veracross is still important to the sentence

2. Traffic jam on Veracross information highway slows report card availability

a. Report card access slowed by traffic jam on Veracross

3. Internet Traffic jam slows report card availability: internet gets more hits

4. Traffic jam on Veracross information highway slows report card availability

Overload on network slow report card availability

5. Overload on student portal

Traffic jam on Veracross information highway slows report card availability

6. Traffic jam on Veracross information highway slows report card availability (Front page)

Busy Veracross slows report card availability

**Information highway vs. Veracross,
overload vs. traffic jam, network vs.
information highway, slows vs. jams,
availability vs. access**