

News report summaries

Updated November 24

Overview You will do two news report summaries this semester. The main goal for these is to sharpen your skills as a critical reader of statistical content in news reports. For each, you will find a news report with some statistical content and then apply your knowledge of statistics from this course in writing a summary and critique.

Details For each of the two assignments, you will find a news report that deals with the results of a study and has some statistical content. The news report you use should come from an established source aimed at a broad audience such as a newspaper or magazine. You can use an online source but should take care in evaluating the rigor of a source that is not widely known. Check with me if you are not sure. You should find your own reports and not use one if you know someone else in the class is using it.

Your summary should focus on explaining the nature and results of the study in terms of the concepts and language we have been covering in this course. Here are some specific questions you might address:

- What broad question is being addressed by the study?
- To what group(s) does the question apply?
- Is the study experimental or observational?
- For an experimental study, what are the treatments and outcomes?
- What are the relevant variables in the study? Which are explanatory and which are response?
- What is the size of the sample in the study? How were subjects in the sample selected?
- What are the parameters (means, proportions, something else) of interest?
- What values of statistics (means, proportions, something else) are reported?
- Is causation implied? If so, is a conclusion on causation justified?

Some of these questions might not be relevant to your news report. The news report might not provide enough information to answer all of the relevant questions. You might want to find the original version of the news report. Often, local papers use reports from national papers or wire services. The version that appears in the local paper is often edited to be briefer than the original version. You might also find it informative to trace the source for the news report. The original source might be a press report or a study published in an academic journal. These are sometimes available online. Try searching on any authors or institutions mentioned in the news report.

If your news report discusses several studies or multiple aspects of one study, you can focus on just one part.

You should also provide some critique of the news report. Here's some questions you might address:

- Did the news report omit details that you think are important in understanding or interpreting the study results?
- Are there potentially confounding variables that deserve mention?
- Did the news report misinterpret results or the importance of results?
- Is the headline consistent with the body of the news report?

Due dates The second news report is due Tuesday December 9.