What makes premises acceptable?

GENERAL POINT: When appraising an argument, we have to ask ourselves whether there is a reasonable basis for accepting the premises on which the argument is based. Premises are rationally acceptable when it would be reasonable for the person to whom the argument is addressed to accept them.

Can the issue of acceptability depend on the reader or the audience? This general account of acceptability points out that the issue is dependent upon contextual issues: background knowledge, perspective, etc. It is most reasonable to take the perspective of you the reader. If you can accept—that is, believe—the premises of an argument without violating any standard of evidence or certainty, then you find its premises rationally acceptable.

What are the standards of evidence or certainty? Can we come up with a single standard of evidence for evaluating the premises of an argument? Why or why not? Premises can be about absolutely anything. So, to say, in an absolutely general way and in complete detail, what makes premises acceptable is not possible.

What Govier attempts to do is to provide some general guidelines, some heuristics for determining generally if a premise is acceptable. Another important element of assessing the acceptability of premises is thinking about issues related to credibility and authority. We need to acquire some basic measures for determining when information is acceptable based on the credibility or authority of the source.

When Are Premises Acceptable?

Premises are acceptable when:

1. They are supported by a cogent subargument.
2. They are supported elsewhere by the arguer or another person, and this fact is noted (as in a footnote or other citation).
3. They are known to be a priori true.
   - Claims that are a priori are knowable to be true or false on the basis of reasoning and the analysis of meaning. There are generally two recognizable types of claims true a priori:
     i. Syntactically analytic claims are true or false by virtue of their logical structure or form. For example: “Either it is raining now or it is not raining now.”
     ii. Semantically analytic claims are true or false because of the meanings of key words in them. They are “true by definition.” For example: “All bachelors are unmarried men.”
4. They are a matter of common knowledge. A claim states something that is known by virtually everyone or widely believed and there is no widely known evidence against it. Common knowledge is dependent on audience and context.
5. They are a claim to personal testimony. A person testifies as to something he or she has observed, felt, recalled and we accept the claim about that experience as described. Three conditions must be satisfied:
   i. The claim is not implausible.
   ii. The source is reliable.
   iii. The claim is about personal experience and not making interpretive or evaluative judgments.

6. They are supported by an appropriate appeal to authority. A recognized, credible expert makes a claim within his or her area of specialization, regarding subject matter for which there is not disagreement.

7. They are not known to be unacceptable, as such, and can serve provisionally as the basis for argument.

When Are Premises Unacceptable?

Premises are unacceptable when:

1. They can be easily refuted by being shown to be false:
   • by citing counterexamples to universal or general claims,
   • by citing common knowledge, personal testimony, or expert testimony.

2. They are known to be a priori false.
   For example: “As a bachelor, Jay is a happily married man.”

3. One premise is inconsistent with one or more premises.

4. They are vague or ambiguous.

5. They depend on faulty assumptions.

6. They are not more acceptable than the conclusion.

7. They beg the question: occurs when the arguer assumes what is at issue, or when the conclusion or some statement presupposing the conclusion is introduced as a premise.

Examples of arguments that beg the question:

1. Everybody has a right to choose what to do with their own lives.
   Therefore,
   2. People should be able to decide for themselves when they want to die.

1. People have a right to smoke in public places.
   Therefore,
   2. I am perfectly entitled to smoke in public places if I wish to do so.

Think about the relationship between the premise and the conclusion in these two arguments. They basically state the same claim using slightly different words. The premises do not provide any independent grounds for accepting the conclusion. Rather, they simply restate the conclusion. These are examples of arguments that beg the question. Begging the question is also referred to as circular argument.
Assessing Claims

Assessing Claims Based on Common knowledge
If a premise states something that is known by virtually everyone, it should be allowed as an acceptable premise. Or, if a premise is very widely believed, and there is no widely known evidence against it, it is often appropriate to allow it as acceptable.

We should note here the distinction between what counts as common knowledge and what counts as truth. What counts as common knowledge is to some extent dependent on audience and context. What is true does not vary depending on what time people live in and what they believe, but what is known does. What is common knowledge at one time and place may not be common knowledge at another time and place. This means that the A condition, and argument cogency generally, are considered with some reference to the context in which arguments appear.

Assessing Comparative Claims
The following are questions you should consider before giving credit to a comparative claim that comes from a potentially untrustworthy source:

1. Are both terms of the comparison clear? Such claims as "25 percent larger," "cut by over half," and "40 percent fewer," immediately demand the question "than what?" If no answer is clearly stated or implied, dismiss the comparison. Sometimes, too, the comparative data needed to evaluate a general claim are not made clear, and then we cannot be certain of the significance of the claim.

2. Is the same standard of comparison used for both terms?

3. Are the items comparable?

4. Are before/after changes genuine or due only to changes in reporting and recording practices?

5. Is the range of comparison too broad or too vague to be meaningful?

6. Is the comparison itself too obscure to be meaningful?

7. Is the comparison expressed as an average? If so, be sure that important details have not been omitted? In statistics the word "average" is used in three different senses: mean, median, and mode. In evaluating arguments and inferences that rest upon averages, it is often important to know in precisely what sense the word is being used.

Assessing Claims Based on Personal and Eyewitness Testimony
Under some conditions, a claim is acceptable on the basis of a person's testimony. That is to say, a person testifies as to, or tells about, something he or she has experience, and, given certain conditions, we accept the claim about that experience as described.
Typically, if other people tell us they have experienced something, we are inclined to take their word for it. We trust their word unless we have some specific reason not to do so.

When are we justified in rejecting a person's testimony? There are several factors that rationally undermine our initial tendency to trust a person's testimony:

i. The plausibility of the claim asserted. If a person claims, as a matter of personal experience, to have witnessed something that is, according to common knowledge or to our own personal related beliefs, extremely implausible, we may doubt his or her testimony merely because of the implausibility of the claim.

ii. The reputation of the person or source making the claim. Simply put: The person must be an honest and reliable observer. What kinds of factors would be relevant to determining if we should refuse to accept a person's testimony because they are unreliable?

- lying or deliberate deception
- flawed observers: handicapped or biased in some way that makes their observations nonstandard and their testimony questionable
- vested interest

iii. The degree to which the claim is about personal experience. A person can testify, on the basis of personal experience, as to what he or she did experience, but testimony cannot render acceptable claims that go beyond personal experience to interpretation and judgment. Broadly speaking, experience includes observations, feelings, and memories. Interpretive and evaluative claims cannot be rendered acceptable merely by testimony, because they depend upon a broader basis of evidence and the discretion, common sense, and background knowledge, of the person making the judgment. The claims acceptable on the basis of personal testimony must be restricted in content to what a person could experience.

Observation reports refer to the statements made by people describing events or objects that they have witnessed (or are witnessing) firsthand. Observers sometimes make mistakes. They can mistake what they observe, or they can misdescribe what they observe, or both. Presented with observation reports, we therefore have to make up our minds whether to accept them. In making such decisions, we can be guided by what we know about five sorts of factors which affect the value of such reports.

1. Situation of the observer. Was the person who is making the report close by to what she is reporting on? If the report is based on visual observation, did she have a good look, or did she just glimpse something out of the corner of her eye. How long did she look? Was she paying attention to the matter on which she is now reporting, or was her attention on something else? Was she upset or under stress while she was making the observation (for example, during a car accident or a robbery)? In short, how good an
opportunity did she have to determine perceptually what happened and how well disposed was her state of mind for making accurate observations?

2. Perceptual acuity. Some people have better eyesight than others, some have better hearing, some can discriminate tastes better, some can distinguish shades of color better, and so on. Accordingly, one of the things to know is whether a reporter has average, above-average, or below-average perceptual acuity in the sense modality on which the report is based. Does he need glasses or a hearing aid? If he does, was he using them at the time?

3. Environing conditions. We can see better in bright midday light than in the waning light of dusk, hear what is said better when there is no background noise, discriminate colors better in sunlight than in artificial light, read tiny print better if we are using a magnifying glass. All of us have a great deal of commonsense knowledge concerning what sorts of environing conditions affect the reliability of perceptual reports. In light of that background knowledge, we can find out pertinent facts about the conditions that actually obtained for the observation being reported.

4. Instruments. In many cases, the observations performed involve the use of equipment or instruments. Observers depend on eyeglasses, hearing aids, microscopes, binoculars, telescopes, telephones, or P.A. systems. The credibility of their observation reports can be affected by the presence or absence of such instruments, and by their quality and state of repair. If the reporter was not wearing his glasses, or the telephone lines were very noisy, then the accuracy of what he says he saw, or the precision of his report of a telephone conversation, is compromised.

5. Training/knowledge of the observer. Observations do not just happen. People making observations need to look in the right place, from the right angle, and to recognize what they see. If they do not know what to look for, or how to look for it, or are unable to recognize it when they see it, their observation reports are unlikely to be true. The observer must also be in possession of an adequate descriptive vocabulary, which is also frequently a function of training and knowledge. In some cases the vocabulary is technical—as would be needed for a description of the positions of the various movable parts of an airplane’s wings and tail when it was landing. In some cases all that is needed is training in making a description precise, something fostered in high school or college writing class. In general, then, what are required are the knowledge and training necessary to make and to describe the observation.

Potential Sources of Eyewitness Error
1. Was the witness in a position to make accurate observations? There are various issues we need to consider such as lighting, distance, whether a witness normally wears glasses or not.
2. How were the witness’ observations influenced by the witness’ state of mind, her prior beliefs and expectations? What kinds of things can influence our perceptions?
   i. stress or fear (when involved in a crime) can disrupt perceptions and memory.
ii. our expectations and preconceptions

3. In what ways have the witness’ recollections of the events been influenced during the time between making the observations and giving testimony?

4. Is the witness testifying to the truth as she remembers it, or is she lying?

Assessing Claims Owing to Credibility

It is generally reasonable to accept informative claims without supporting arguments if they come from a credible source and do not conflict with what you have observed or with other credible claims. In deciding whether to accept a piece of testimony on someone’s authority or say-so, two factors should be taken into account:

(1) The credibility of the source that puts forward the claim as true. In general, the more knowledgeable a person is about a given subject, the more reason there is to accept what the person says about it. There are some additional points to keep in mind:

   i. A source’s credibility is relative to subject-matter.
   ii. The kind of experience or training required to be a credible source varies.
   iii. Credibility comes in degrees. It is not always a matter of being or not being credible. Credibility may often be a matter of degree and then you will have to exercise your judgment.

(2) The plausibility, given other things you know, of the claim asserted or put forward as true.

These two factors are interrelated in that the less plausible a claim, the greater must be the credibility of the source if its testimony is to render that claim acceptable.

General Principles in Evaluating Credibility

From these general guidelines, we can derive a list of questions to ask about claims put forward on the say-so of nonexpert sources of information:

1. Did the person have an opportunity to discover or learn the truth of the matter? If so, how good was the opportunity?
2. Does the source have the competence or background knowledge to judge or report about this matter accurately?
3. Does the information or claim being expressed call for specialized knowledge or training (expertise)? If so, does the source have such expertise?
4. Are there excepting conditions in this case which would call the person’s dependability into question (for example, pressure, bias, interest, haste)?
Assessing Claims Based on Authority
There is some similarity between this condition and personal testimony. In both cases, we are being asked to accept a claim on the basis of someone's having asserted it. The difference is that here the testimony involves specialized knowledge by a recognized expert—it is not simply relating one's personal experience. Personal testimony does not require specialized knowledge: we can all testify about our own experience.

Should we accept an expert's testimony under any conditions? An especially careful appeal to authority can render a claim acceptable. Such an appeal may be set out as follows:

1. Expert X has asserted claim P.
2. P falls within area of specialization K.
3. K is a genuine area of knowledge.
   The claim must lie within a specific field of knowledge. There must be a systematic body of beliefs about them.
4. The experts in K agree about P.
5. X is an expert or authority in K.
6. X is honest and reliable.
Therefore,
7. P is acceptable.

Appeals to authority which do not meet all of these conditions are fallacious appeals to authority.

Evaluating the Credibility of Expert Reports

1. Does the proposition supposedly warranted by expert testimony belong to an area where expertise is required or can exist? The claim must come from an appropriate domain of knowledge.
2. Does the person appealed to as a credible expert need credentials? What are those credentials and does the alleged expert have them? Is that person an expert in the particular area to which the proposition in question belongs?
3. Has the expert actually conducted an investigation of the matter on which he or she is making a pronouncement? And if so, how thorough an investigation?
4. Do different more or less equally authoritative experts disagree about whether the proposition in question is true or probable? Is there consensus among the relevant experts supporting the claim?
5. Are there specific reasons to suspect that the expert appealed to might not be candid or might unintentionally mislead? Is the expert trustworthy and free from bias?

Accepting Premises Provisionally
Suppose you cannot judge the premises acceptable on any of the grounds mentioned here, but, on the other hand, neither do you have a definite basis for deeming them
It is important when we do this that we realize that the conclusion we reach is entirely conditional upon our provisional acceptance of the premises. The conclusion is acceptable if the premises are, and we have provisionally accepted the premises because we have found no specific reason to reject them.

Credibility and the News Media

INFORMATION TAILORING AND THE NEWS

One powerful way to influence a person's attitudes and behavior is to select the information a person receives, since our attitudes are shaped in large part by our information. Some reasons for being careful when using the various news media as sources of information:

1. There is no ironclad guarantee that the media are presenting news in a thoroughly factual, unbiased fashion. Even the news that is supposedly reported in neutral and objective language is subject to shaping by the conscious and subconscious perspectives of those who write and control it.

2. The great bulk of news is given to reporters, not dug up after weeks or days or even hours of investigation. Press conferences and press releases are the standard means of getting news from both government and private industry into the mass media. And, since spokespersons in neither government nor industry are especially stupid or self-destructive, they tend to produce news items that they and the people they represent want to see in the media. Further, because reporters depend on sources in governmental and private institutions to pass items along, reporters who offend those sources are not likely to have them very long.

3. The news media are private businesses and have to do whatever it takes to make a profit, even if this affects which items make the headlines and which are left out entirely. Aside from the sources of news, the media must therefore be careful not to overly offend two other powerful constituencies: their advertisers and their audiences.

4. Consider the significance of ratings and ratings wars: In order not to offend their audiences, to keep their attention, and charge top dollars for advertising minutes, the media may intentionally oversimplify the information presented. Sensational, unusual, and easily understood subjects can be counted on to receive more attention than the unexciting, the usual, and the complicated, even if the latter are much more important in the long run. The same kind of mass preference holds for people as well as issues and events. The number of show business people interviewed on talk shows far outweighs the
effects that entertainers have on most of our lives. But they are entertaining in ways that, say, the chairperson of the Federal Reserve Board is not. What is wrong is the overindulgence of our desire to be entertained at the expense of our need to be informed. As long as this is the case, we can count on the media to indulge us; their business is primarily to give us what we will pay for. Like individuals, the media are selective in the information they pass along.

II. How the mass media shape and color the information they transmit

Our interest in looking at the news media is in assessing their credibility as sources of information. The media supply us with information, communicate to us a sense of the significance of that information, shape our attitudes toward that information. The media communicate more than the “facts,” they communicate an impression of the value and significance of those facts.

While attending to the mass media it is important to keep in mind their two-fold function in an economic system of industrial capitalism, as this influences what information reaches us:

(1) Political: Dissemination of certain kinds of information is essential to liberal democracy. Mass media are recognized as essential to liberal democracies. Freedom of the press is enshrined in the American Constitution (the First Amendment) for example.

(2) Economic: At the same time that they provide for the transmission of information, the privately owned mass media are sources of substantial profits for their owners. They are also essential means of mass market advertising for producers of goods and services, and so for the profits of those owners as well.

It is important that we understand the ways the mass media shape and color the information they transmit. Our aim is to provide an account that can be used to help you to screen or monitor information conveyed via the mass media, so that you may receive and record it with the appropriate qualifications.

I. The Mode of Presentation

1. **Symbolism**: position of columns and headlines, backdrops, the appearance of TV journalists and anchorpersons, the music preceding a news show, the positioning of the anchor desk.

2. **News Reports as “Stories”**: The selection of details, descriptions, points of view, organization, and other choices a reporter must make. News reports must be crafted by the reporter, who has to organize and present a coherent account out of a plethora of details connected with events being reported. Which details are
selected for mention, how they are described, and the way the presentation is organized are choices made by the reported alone or with an editor or producer.

3. **Descriptions**: The language used to portray events, including the use of slanting devices. Language selection portrays the events in a certain light and responsible information collection requires noticing and taking account of how it does so. Note how words or expressions convey one among alternative possible interpretations of the events reported.

4. **Quotations and Visuals**: The selection of quotations and video clips in news stories, the choice of visuals or photos to accompany a story, the visual setting of a story.

5. **Headlines**: Headlines should accurately reflect the story content and not give a misleading angle. The function of headlines is to inform the reader about the report’s contents and to interest the reader in the story. As a rule, a headline is not written by the reported who prepares the story. The editor or headline writer who composes the headline—usually shortly before the newspaper goes to press—has only a few minutes to scan the story to get an idea of its contents and then compose a headline that will fit a preassigned space and type size. As a result, sometimes headlines are inaccurate, and sometimes they are misleading. A headline also predisposes us to interpret what we read in terms of the slant or angle it gives to the story.

6. **Lead**: the opening paragraphs of a news story which communicates the angle or slant of the story. The opening couple of paragraphs of a news story are called the lead. In the traditional news story, the lead is a short paragraph that attempts to sum up the most important facts or ideas in the story in an attention getting way, and it usually communicates the angle or slant of the story.

II. Content of the Information

1. **Incompleteness**: Omitting information needed to make sense of news reports. This can happen in a number of ways: Missing Balance: A report lacks balance when, although it concerns a dispute between two or more parties, it doesn’t present the views of all parties to the dispute. There are cases where understanding the significance of the events requires hearing the opinions of all the interested parties, but some are left out. Limited Sources: News reports frequently rely on one or two sources for their facts, often sources whose competence and/or impartiality is unclear or dubious. Missing Background. Missing Connections: All too often news stories contain only reports of events, or politician’s assertions, without setting them in their social and political contexts.

2. **Systematic Incompleteness**: Systematically blocking out information that is incompatible with the fundamental values and operating assumptions of the society through either deliberate censorship or unconscious self-censorship.

3. **Fragmentation**: News coverage is almost universally a collection of short, unrelated snippets of information. The fragmentation of the news—its lack of context—interferes with our need to form a coherent picture of our world and to find a coherent picture of our own lives within it.
4. **Bias**: Someone is biased, or has a bias, when they have a special interest in an issue such as something personal to gain—perhaps a grievance to settle or a benefit to secure—which may be expected to cause them deliberately to be misleadingly selective in representing their point of view.

We need to be especially wary of getting our news through TV. We often assume that because we can “control” what we see and we see what is happening for ourselves, that TV news is less susceptible to these problems. But the selectivity of camera shots and the dramatic narrative structuring TV news belief the impression that television is the exception where the viewer can simply “see for himself or herself” what occurs.

**Media Checklist**

To establish a measure of independence from the media’s outlook, and to evaluate the information the media provide, one has to become a viewer, listener, or reader who actively engages the news while watching, listening to, or reading it. Here is a checklist with some of the main questions an active, critical media consumer will ask and try to answer.

**FOR ALL NEWS MEDIA:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Headline</strong></th>
<th>Is the headline’s or summary’s angle justified by the events reported in the story?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead</strong></td>
<td>Are there more important aspects of the story than the one(s) featured in the reporter’s opening paragraphs or the anchor’s introduction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Would alternative descriptions or word choice cast the events reported in a different light?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance</strong></td>
<td>Are the views of different parties to a dispute reported equally and adequately?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td>Does the story rely heavily on one or two sources? If so, do those sources have an interest in how the story is presented? Do they represent a restricted point of view? In general, do the sources seem credible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
<td>Is enough background supplied to permit you to understand the events and their significance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assumption</strong></td>
<td>What assumptions about what is important underlie the decision to report these events. What assumptions underlie the way that the events are reported? Is there any reason to question those assumptions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bias</strong></td>
<td>Is there evidence in the way the story is written that the reporter is promoting a partisan viewpoint on a controversial issue as if it were the objective truth?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ESPECIALLY FOR TELEVISION NEWS AND TV NEWS MAGAZINES:**
### Visuals
Does the film used have an impact that is justified by the message of the voice-over or the “talking head”? Is either justified?

### Drama
What is the story line—the “plot outline” conveyed by the packaging of the report? What is the “predicament” and how is it “resolved”? Is there a hero or a villain? Is there a “moral” to the story? Is this story presented as an episode in a larger drama? Is either the dramatic structure or the larger dramatic context controversial or questionable?

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## The Internet and Credibility

There are a number of excellent web resources available that provide detailed information on assessing the credibility of internet sources. So supplement the material presented in Govier, you should briefly review some of the following web sites:

- [Thinking Critically About World Wide Web Resources](#)
- [Evaluating Web Pages](#)
- [Evaluating Internet Research Sources](#)

This last link develops a succinct system for evaluating internet research sources, called the CARS Checklist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>trustworthy source, author’s credentials, evidence of quality control, known or respected authority, organizational support. Goal: an authoritative source, a source that supplies some good evidence that allows you to trust it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>up to date, factual, detailed, exact, comprehensive, audience and purpose reflect intentions of completeness and accuracy. Goal: a source that is correct today (not yesterday), a source that gives the whole truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonableness</td>
<td>fair, balanced, objective, reasoned, no conflict of interest, absence of fallacies or slanted tone. Goal: a source that engages the subject thoughtfully and reasonably, concerned with the truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>listed sources, contact information, available corroboration, claims supported, documentation supplied. Goal: a source that provides convincing evidence for the claims made, a source you can triangulate (find at least two other sources that support it).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at Credibility

In 1985 a case came to trial in Boston that centered around a police detective striking a man in Chinatown. Seven people spoke at the trial: Long Kuang Huang (alleged victim), Detective Francis Kelly, Bao Tang Huang (Huang’s wife), Audrey Manns (prostitute), Paul Bates (construction worker—witness), Gretl Nunnemacher (defense witness), and Dr. Jane Silva (neurologist). Use the Grid below the article to rate each speaker on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being high, or very credible, 1 being low—not credible).

* * *

DEFENSE WITNESSES DESCRIBE CHINATOWN BEATING

John H. Kennedy

Defense witnesses in the non jury trial of Long Kuang Huang yesterday drew a sympathetic portrait of the peasant farmer from China as perhaps a victim of mistaken identity just 10 months after he immigrated to the United States.

Huang, 56, is on trial in Boston Municipal Court on charges of soliciting sex for a fee and assault and battery on Detective Francis G. Kelly Jr. last May 1 near the Combat Zone. Attorneys are scheduled to give closing arguments this morning before Judge George A. O’Toole Jr. makes his decision.

In the final day of testimony, all the witnesses were called by Huang’s attorneys, and included his wife. Some described the scuffle between Kelly and Huang, although their versions differed on details.

The case has become the focus of charges by some Asian-Americans of police brutality. Kelly faces police department hearings on his conduct during the May 1 incident.

Bao Tang Huang, 52, whose testimony in Chinese was translated, said her husband could write his name in English, but did not speak English. His only experience with police was in China where officers wear white uniforms and do not carry badges, she said.

Both grew up and lived in a “large village” of 300 people in the People’s Republic, where Huang was a farmer. They have two sons, who came with them to Boston July 1, 1984. Huang has no formal education and has worked in restaurants in the Boston area, she said.

Earlier this week, prostitute Audrey Manns identified Huang in court as the man who spoke broken English to her, and who made it clear that he would pay her $30 to have sex with him. Kelly testified he followed them for two or three blocks before arresting Manns, and then Huang after an extended struggle, in front of 35 Kneeland St.

Kelly and Manns testified that Huang kicked and hit the detective several times before Kelly connected with a single punch to Huang’s face in an attempt to subdue him. The detective also testified he identified himself as a police office, both with his badge and by speaking to Huang.

Two defense witnesses yesterday said the detective connected with two punches to Huang’s face, while Manns told the detective to stop.

Paul Bates, 39, was working on a renovation project at 35 Kneeland St. when he said he saw a woman in an “electric blue” outfit and “bright blonde” hair walk by with a man who looked Hispanic.
A short time later, Bates said he came onto the street and saw Kelly struggling with Huang. The blonde woman in the blue outfit, who he said was Manns, came over to the two.

“She told him [Huang] to stop struggling, the other person was a police officer,” said Bates. Bates said Manns told Kelly: “He’s not the man. I wasn’t with him. He was just walking down the sidewalk. I swear to God, Kelly.”

He said he later saw Kelly connect with two “short, chopping punches.”

The version of another defense witness, Gretl Nunnemacher, differed somewhat from Bates’. She said Kelly slammed Huang against the side of the car “several” times, Kelly’s fist started to come down but she said she didn’t see it land.

Then, said Nunnemacher, a blonde woman emerged from another car. “She said, ‘Kelly, Kelly, what are you doing. Stop,’ …She told me he was a cop.”

Dr. Jane Silva, a neurologist who treated Huang at the New England Medical Center, said Huang suffered a concussion with post-concussive symptoms—headaches, dizziness, listlessness. *Boston Globe*, 23 Aug. 1985

* * *

**Credibility Grid**

**WITNESSES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L. Huang</th>
<th>Det. Kelly</th>
<th>B. Huang</th>
<th>A. Manns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**YOUR RATING:** (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P. Bates</th>
<th>G. Nunnemacher</th>
<th>Dr. Silva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1 = not at all credible, 5 = very credible)

**STANDARDS** (Reasons for your rating)

L. Huang:__________________________________________________________

Det. Kelly:________________________________________________________

B. Huang:________________________________________________________

A. Manns:_________________________________________________________

P. Bates:________________________________________________________

G. Nunnemacher:___________________________________________________

Dr. Silva:________________________________________________________
Assessing Claims

Assess each of the following claims attending to the points discussed in Govier and the material included here. Consider both the content of the claim and, where relevant, the source.

1. “In the early 1800's, bears were a nuisance to settlers in upstate New York.”
   -Smithsonian Magazine

2. University student to professor: “I'm sorry I missed the test on Thursday, Dr. Aarsack. My grandmother unexpectedly died, and I had to go home.”

3. “A few years ago AT&T did two surveys showing that technically trained persons did not achieve as many top managerial jobs in the company as liberal arts graduates did.”
   -New York Times

4. According to the Funk & Wagnalls Hammond World Atlas, the three longest rivers in the world are the Nile, the Amazon, and the Yangtze.

5. Letter to the Editor: “Your editorial page of October 15 contained a cartoon that was highly offensive....”
   -Midfield Sentinel

6. “Q: Did Marilyn Monroe keep a diary about her relationships with John and Robert Kennedy?” “A: No.”
   -Walter Scott's Personality Parade, Parade Weekend Magazine

7. Report heard in a coffee shop: “There is a disproportionate percentage of left-handed people in politics.”

8. “Do you feel insecure? Or are you confident about your position in life? According to Dr. Ian Cameron, how and where you stand in an elevator will reveal the answers to these questions.”
   -reported in the National Examiner. Dr. Cameron is described in the article as “a noted scientist and researcher.”

9. "In no previous epoch were adversaries so continuously and totally mobilized for instant war. It is a statistical certainty that hair-trigger readiness cannot endure as a permanent condition.”
   -Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Bernard Lown, cofounder of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

10. Reagan was a better president than Nixon was.

11. Professional sports? Never watch 'em. They're all fixed.
12. My liberal colleagues in Congress are all big spenders.

13. The world and everything in it was created fifteen minutes ago, complete with fictitious memories and false records.

14. Bomb threats on abortion clinics are called in by the clinics themselves to gain sympathy and support from the public and news media.

15. Digital recordings may be all the rage these days, but every serious audiophile knows that a good analog disc played on a music system of high quality is better than even the best digital version.

16. Every account that Delwood has worked on has come back with computational errors in it.

17. From a letter to the editor: "It appears that the administration's foreign policy is increasingly far out."

18. Conservative Christians are a politically sophisticated voting bloc.

19. Of the over 100,000 aliens who married U.S. citizens last year, 40 percent did so only to bypass immigration laws.

20. A new antilock rear brake system has reduced the distance required to stop from fifty miles per hour by 11 percent.

21. The county unemployment rate went up 40 percent during our opponent's administration, but since we took the reins it has risen only 35 percent in the same length of time. Clearly, we have done the better job.

22. The office has become more productive since we changed from typewriters to word processors, although it took about half a year for the staff to learn how to use them well enough to produce the gain.

23. Beer drinkers are 23.2 times more likely than teetotalers to have unhappy marriages.

24. You'd be better off if you got more sleep.

25. Reading novels is a more productive use of one's time than going to movies.
Credibility in the News: Exercises

Exercise 1
For each of the following passages, a claim has been identified which you are invited to accept on the say-so of a source quoted in the passage. For each claim, assess its credibility given the background information of the source from where it came.

1. Background: The following is an excerpt from an advertisement for PowerBar in *Runner’s World*.

…”I’m not a masters runner; I’m a runner” says New Zealander Cambell from his home in Pittsburg PA. “I want to win races. That means being first across the finish line, not just first over age 40.”

At the Boston Marathon in April, he broke another masters world record with a time of 2 hours, 11 minutes, 4 seconds, placing forth overall.

John began eating PowerBars three years ago. “I often felt I needed something in my stomach before a long run, but every runner worries about getting an upset stomach. Two PowerBars and a couple of cups of water, about two and a half hours before a hard run or a race really fuels me up.”

The emergence of a masters running circuit with substantial sponsorship and prize money motivated him to begin competing again in his late 30’s. His contract with PowerBars enables him to devote full time to training.

“It’s nice to promote a product you use and believe in” he says. “Now, when people at races ask me what my secret is to beating the young guys, I hand them a PowerBar.”

The rest of his secret is training: 130 to 145 miles per week, even when he’s racing.

“I love racing, I love being competitive,” he says. “My body’s geared for racing frequently.”

*Claim: Eating PowerBars will improve your performance as a runner.*

2. The following is excerpted from an issue of the Canadian magazine *Chatelaine* (similar to *Cosmopolitan*).

The benefits of solitude
*It can boost your health & your relationships*
By Elenor Jungkind

Some people fill up their schedule because they thrive on being busy, and others have little choice—demands at home and/or outside the home leave them with little time for themselves. But in many of these cases, making time for yourself can be beneficial and necessary for your physical and mental well-being, according to mental health experts.

Dr. Judith Milstein Katz, a Toronto psychologist, says that spending time alone can improve your health by reducing stress and tension. You can let down your guard, do
what you want and not worry about how others will react. Solitude can also enhance your creativity and problem solving efforts because you have more time to think.

You personal relationships can benefit too. When spouses have time for special interests and hobbies they enjoy on their own, they are less likely to be critical and irritable with each other and generally are more willing to cooperate when they are together, says Dr. Katz.

To get the most out of your solitude, it’s important to focus on something other than your current concerns and to relax. For example, try to avoid spending all of your time stewing about the argument you had with your boss or spouse.

For many women, one of the biggest obstacles to making time for solitude is convincing themselves that it’s worthwhile, according to Dr. Katz. She says that women ought not to feel guilty about taking the time for their own needs and interests.

Claim: Women ought not to feel guilty about taking the time for their own needs and interests.

Exercise 2
The following passages contain one or more propositions which you are invited at accept on the say-so of a source or sources quoted in the passage.

(a) Decide which claims or propositions we are invited to accept on the basis of someone’s testimony. If there are just one or two, write them out. If there is a large number, characterize them in a general way.
(b) How credible is each source? Defend your judgment in light of opportunity, ability, and dependability of the source.

1. Background: This Canadian Press story appeared in November 1983

Caught with a prostitute, politician quits

EDMONTON (CP)-- Alberta Premier Lougheed said today that he has accepted the resignation of Solicitor General Oraham Harle, who was found with a prostitute in his car by police.

Lougheed said Harle submitted his resignation Tuesday. Attorney General Neil Crawford will assume Harle’s responsibilities.

Harle said Tuesday he was simply conducting a one-man investigation of prostitution when police found him with the prostitute in his car a week ago in a seedy area of the city.

IN AN INTERVIEW, he said he has talked to prostitutes since becoming Alberta’s solicitor general in 1979, all in an effort to resolve the issue of prostitution control.

“You don’t get first-hand information by going through several people, do you?”
So far, he said, his only finding in the investigation is that prostitution “doesn’t appear to be a problem right at the moment.”
Before his resignation, Harle had said he would continue the work. Harle said he had insomnia the night the police found him and the prostitute in his government-issue executive Chrysler. HE SAID HE invited the girl into his car because “she was on the street obviously looking to me like she was looking for a ride.” Harle said he had no clue she was a prostitute until they started talking. He said he devoted “miniscule” time to his investigation and hasn’t done similar work on other crimes.

2. The next excerpt is from a page headlined “Calling the Doctor,” consisting of advice about medical care for children. It appeared in Newsweek, Special Issue, Summer 1991.

RECOMENDED IMMUNIZATION TIMES
The following are immunization times recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics:
DTP: 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months, 4-6 years
Polio: 2 months 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months, 4-6 years
Measles: 15 months, 11-12 years
Mumps: 15 months, 11-12 years
Rubella: 15 months, 11-12 years
Haemophilus: 2 months, 4 months. The schedule for additional shots varies.
Tetanus-diphtheria: 14-16 years

3. This excerpt is from a story entitled “Timing Is Everything” that appeared in July 1991.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING
Steady increase in free time
By Trish Hall
New York Times

People are always talking about how busy they are, how starved they feel for time. But do they really have less of it today? John Robinson, a University of Maryland professor of psychology who has been studying the way Americans spend their waking moments for 25 years, asserts that the perception does not match the reality. His findings show a steady increase in free time.

“I’m the guy with the odd data,” says Robinson, who became interested in the use of free time when he was a graduate student at University of Michigan and now directs the Time Project at the University of Maryland’s Survey Research Center in College Park.
He agrees with the widely held notion that people feel more harried. Surveys by poll takers like Louis Harris and Associates, for instance, say they have found that people feel the work week has been increasing and leisure time has been decreasing.

But Robinson, a man of diverse interests and multiple projects who seems perfectly confident that his numbers tell the real story, holds that people remember the past inaccurately.

“The perception of a time crunch appears to have gone up in a period of time where free time has increased,” says Robinson, who, in those 25 years, has studied thousands of diaries that men and women around the country have kept on how they spend their time.

Since 1965, he says, men have gained seven hours of free time in a week, to 41 hours from 34 per weeks.

Women, he reports have gained six hours of free time, to 40 from 34, in a week. Robinson defines free time as any time when people don’t have commitments to work, family, chores, or personal needs like sleeping, eating and grooming.

Robinson is considered one of the few experts on spending time who is able to make comparisons over decades.

“Very few people actually study how we use time,” Geoffrey Godbey of the leisure studies department at Pennsylvania State University.

He characterizes Robinson’s work as “first rate,” an evaluation echoed by colleagues in the field.