Find a Candidate Story
A censored news story reports information that the public has a right and need to know, but to which the public has limited access. Validated Independent News stories take the form of new reports.
Do not include press releases, academic journal articles, public relations materials, or editorial and opinion pieces.
Search independent news sources to find candidate stories. See the Project Censored website for recommended independent news sources: https://www.projectcensored.org/independent-news-links/
ProQuest’s Alt-Press Watch is also a useful database.

Evaluate Your Candidate Story’s Strength
The strongest candidate stories are important, timely, fact-based, well documented, and under-reported. Once you have found a candidate story, test its significance by considering these questions:
1. Is it important? The more people that the story affects, the more important it is. Be careful to consider indirect impacts.
2. Is it timely? Only stories published since March 2022 will be considered for State of the Free Press 2024. Recent articles on older events will be considered if they report new, important information.
3. Is it fact-based and well documented? The story’s accuracy and credibility are crucial. How many different sources does the story use? How credible is each source? Dramatic and sensational claims do not matter if the story fails to provide adequate supporting evidence.
If your story cites other published work (for example, a scientific study, government document, or another news story), track down that source and read it. Does your story accurately depict the original?
4. Have corporate media under-reported the story? Evaluate your story’s coverage by using a news database (such as LexisNexis Newsdesk, ProQuest US Major Dailies, or EBSCO Newspaper Source Plus) to search for corporate news reports on it.
Check with your instructor or your school’s reference librarian to determine what news databases you can access.

Summarize Your Candidate Story
Your submission should include a title, a summary of the story’s key points and corporate news coverage, references, and credits for who researched and evaluated the story. All candidate stories submitted to Project Censored must use the following format.

Improperly formatted or incomplete submissions will be returned for revision.

TITLE This captures the story’s most important point in 5-10 words. Make sure your title is different from the title used in the original article.

SUMMARY (400-600 words)
The first paragraph should provide a specific and factual summary of the story’s most important points. Identify the source and date of the story in the first paragraph of your summary.

Your first sentence—known in journalism as a summary lead—should introduce who did what, where, and when.
Be specific. Use active verbs. Avoid passive constructions (for example, “Civilians were targeted”) that hide agency (who did what).

For a guide to writing a strong lead, see: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/journalism_and_journalistic_writing/writing_leads.html.

The second paragraph should provide additional detail including, for example, a quote from one of the story’s sources, background, or statistics.

Add detail to your summary in order of importance, so that the least important items are
Identify student researcher and faculty evaluator
Identify the student researcher(s) and faculty evaluator(s) by name and, in parentheses, school affiliation. For example:

STUDENT RESEARCHER: First Name Last Name (School Name)
FACULTY EVALUATOR: First Name Last Name (School Name)

Identifying, researching, and summarizing candidate stories will sharpen your critical thinking skills (including interpretation, evaluation, and explanation) and enhance your critical media literacy.

Project Censored posts selected Validated Independent News (VINs) online at http://www.projectcensored.org/category/validated-independent-news/
These VINs are considered for inclusion among the top 25 stories in Project Censored’s annual book.

Online and in the book, we acknowledge the students and faculty who contribute VINs by name.

FINAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Candidate VINs must be submitted to Project Censored by Friday, April 7, 2023 to be considered for inclusion in State of the Free Press 2024.

Check with your instructor to confirm specific due dates for your news research and story summary.

Since 1976 students’ research of important but under-reported news stories has been Project Censored’s lifeblood. We look forward to your contributions!

Revised: August 2021 by Andy Lee Roth and Steve Macek