

FIRST AMENDMENT SUMMER INSTITUTE      2010  
Freedom of Speech and the Press in the Information Age  
Free Speech on the Internet, Blogs and in the Traditional Press

**Overview of Lesson:**

**Critical Engagement Question:** Are bloggers journalists? If so, are they worthy of the legal protections provided to print and broadcast journalists?

**Review:**

What is the Bill of Rights? Do we need it?

Who decides if it is being violated? Why is that important?

Does the balance/tipping point between liberty and security ever change? When? Why?

Should it?

Review the objectives of the lesson to be sure that the students understand the purpose and protections of freedom of the press before proceeding with the rest of the lesson. The ideas should be introduced here and reinforced throughout the lesson.

**Background**

This lesson is designed for grades 9-12. The readings are a bit challenging so modifications may need to be made for younger students or lower level readers. It could work with junior high students with more front loading of information.

In order to better comprehend the articles by Hudson, Specter and Mukasey some focus or guide questions could be given with the reading assignment.

**Vocabulary:** Be sure the students can define and correctly use the following terms: journalist; blog/blogger; shield law (what, why, how it works); federalism; statute

**Homework/Warm-up**

Younger students might need a worksheet to help them understand the warm-up brainstorming activity (see attached).

**Activity:**

The directions are straightforward. Do the readings and answer the guide questions. Be sure to link the questions with the provisions in the First Amendment. Arrange partners or groups as needed in your classroom.

**Extensions:**

For the first extension you might want to divide the class into groups and have one group select a local news issue, one could select a state issue, another group could use a national issue, and one could use an international issue (emphasize perspective).

The second extension could include a letter to a member of Congress or the editor of a news publication. Another possibility is to ask students to write their own blogs about the subject. They could also do debates, infomercials, posters, songs, skits, etc.

**Additional discussion points:**

Remind students of the role of the press as a check on the powers of government. What are the limits of the press? Why?

KNOWLEDGE is POWER. Who has access to knowledge and power in our political culture?

Why is there tension between journalists and bloggers?

What is truth and how do we find it? How do we know if a blog or news article is biased or accurate?

Why is perspective important in sharing thoughts about issues and reporting the news?

How is the internet changing journalism and information processing?

For each of the following situations would you rather read a blog or a traditional article? Why?

Ratings for a new restaurant

A concert review

The latest plan for Afghanistan

The president's meeting with the head of Israel

The latest development on the oil spill

How to get rid of beetles in your garden

The lesson "Should Reporting Be limited during Time of War?" is a very good follow-up to this lesson. It raises many issues about access to information (who needs to know what? how should they find out?) as well as the relationship between liberty and security.

The goal for these lessons is to help the students become critical consumers of information and thus better informed and responsible citizens.

## Brainstorm Worksheet: Journalists and Bloggers

Qualities that define the work of a Journalist	Qualities that define the work of a Blogger

Definition of a Journalist:

Definition of a Blogger:

Draw a Venn Diagram showing the relationship between journalists and bloggers.