



Student Handout 3: Citizen Journalism

Background: The arrival of low-cost, personal computers and high-speed internet connections has created a communication phenomenon not seen since humans learned to talk. While the printing press and inexpensive paper made information available to millions of people, the producers of this information were still the elite. They had the technical knowledge and financial resources to produce the information. Delivery of publications to the average citizen was relatively slow whether on horseback or even by plane. Radio and television gradually made the distribution of information more instantaneous, but the producers of the information were still the ones who controlled the content and timing. Computers and the Internet have changed all this, as the two articles will show.

Directions:

1. Go to the *Pew Internet & American Life Project* survey report entitled Teen Content Creators and Consumers at http://www.pewtrusts.com/pdf/PIP_Teens_1105.pdf. Review the “Summary of Findings.” These pages can be downloaded and printed for easier use.
2. Next, go to the NewsHour web page at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec05/citizen_11-16.html and review the segment “The Rise of Citizen Journalism.” If possible, watch the streaming video of the segment while reviewing the transcript as it contains visual as well as audio information that will give you a sense of the power of the medium.
3. After reviewing the articles, discuss the questions below and fill out the chart to organize your thoughts. Then write a news report summarizing your findings from the articles and your thoughts on the issues presented.
 - a. What surprised you when you read the summary of the survey Teen Content Creators and Consumers? What did you already know or have a pretty good idea of?
 - b. The survey reported over 87% of students ages 12-17 are online and over half of them are content creators. According to the survey, what type of information are students publishing online?
 - c. Do you publish information online or know of other students who do and if so, what are they publishing?
 - d. Describe some of the advantages and limitations for students of online publishing vs. traditional school newspaper publishing.
 - e. The survey also brings up the topic of downloading and file-sharing copyrighted content without permission. Do you agree with the students’ comments that music downloading is so easy to do, its unrealistic to expect people not to do it? Why or why not? Under what circumstances might you feel different or hold the opposite view?
 - f. Describe the different citizen journalism projects mentioned in the NewsHour segment “The Rise of Citizen Journalism.” What news consumer needs did these projects fulfill?
 - g. Do you think citizen journalism is a good idea? What are some of the problems with citizen journalism? How might these problems be solved?
 - h. How might citizen journalism help further promote some of the core values of American democracy? If possible, how might it undermine some of these values?

- i. Right now, there is very little government oversight of content published on the Internet. Under what circumstances, if any, do you feel the government should have the right to preview and possibly censor stories from citizen journalists?
- j. Write a news story from the information your group discussed in the questions above.

4. Tell students their news stories should address the central question of how has citizen journalism changed the way news consumers receive and use their news. Ask them to provide some background information on the survey results and the information from the NewsHour segment on “Citizen Journalism” to support their views. Students could examine the impact technology has had on the way news is distributed and consumed now as to how it was for their parents. In addition, students could explore the impact of citizen journalism on American constitutional democratic values and consider whether this form of journalism should have any government oversight or guidelines.

Use the chart below to organize your news story on citizen journalism.

(Use additional paper if necessary)

Notes from “Teen Content Creators and Consumers”	
General thoughts of the survey results	
What type of information is being published by teens using the Internet?	
What are some of the advantages and limitations between online and traditional school publishing?	
What are your thoughts on downloading copyrighted materials?	

Notes from “The Rise of Citizen Journalism”	
Describe some citizen journalism projects and the needs they fulfill.	
What are your opinions on citizen journalism, the problems involved and possible solutions to these problems?	
How does citizen journalism promote core values of American democracy?	
The issue of government oversight of content on the Internet– needed? Not needed? Reasons.	