
A ssessment

Lesson 1

What Is Good Consumer Reporting?

Learn about the characteristics of a good consumer-focused article. This lesson can be taught immediately after the introductory lesson or after students have participated in the lessons in the three previous units.

Lesson 2

Performance Assessment: On Assignment

Write an article to help consumers make informed decisions about what products to buy. A scoring guide is provided (to remind students of what quality work looks like and to aid teachers in grading). A post-test on consumer habits may also be administered.

Of course, other assessments of student learning are possible. For example, students might plan a campaign to educate consumers about fair trade and organic products; another option would be for the product-based groups to make panel presentations about the most important consumer information about their topics.

We also recommend administering the post-test, which is the same as the pre-test. You or students could then tally responses and consider how student thinking has changed as a result of participating in these lessons.

Lesson 1

What Is Good Consumer Reporting?



INTRODUCTION

This lesson prepares students for the assessment, in which they write an article for consumers of flowers, coffee or bananas. Students learn about the qualities of good consumer reporting and analyze examples of consumer-focused articles to determine whether they reflect those qualities.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the qualities of good consumer reporting.
- Analyze examples of consumer reporting according to the standards they have established.

STANDARDS

Economics

- **Standard 1:** Scarcity

English/Language Arts

- **Standard 3:** Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate texts.
- **Standard 4:** Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Soccer ball (optional)
- “Buying a Soccer Ball—What’s the Story Behind the Ball?” handout
- “Journalistic Standards” handout
- “Is It a Good Article?” handout
- Internet access or a sample of articles on consumer issues in hard copy

PROCEDURE

1. Read a Consumer Article on Soccer Balls

If you have a soccer ball, toss it to a student and ask him/her to suggest one topic that might be covered in a consumer article about soccer balls. Allow students

to toss the ball around the class, with each student catching the ball suggesting something that might be mentioned in such an article.

Distribute the “Buying a Soccer Ball—What’s the story behind the ball?” handout and read it with the class or allow time for students to read it individually. Have students underline or highlight portions of the article that:

- Represent the qualities of good consumer reporting
- Represent flaws in consumer reporting
- Show positive qualities in the article that they did not include on their list

2. Identify Qualities of Good Consumer Reporting

Pass out “Journalistic Standards” and read it with the class. Discuss why it is important for a reporter to comply with the standards. For example, how would a consumer feel if the reporter had taken lots of free products from the manufacturers? (*They may not find the reporter to be trustworthy.*) Have students add any other qualities of good consumer reporting to the “Journalistic Standards” handout.

3. Analyze Other Examples of Consumer Reporting

Distribute the “Is It a Good Article?” handout and have students insert the qualities of good consumer reporting where indicated. Then have pairs of students analyze articles on consumer-related issues to see if these qualities are present. If you do not have Internet access, provide each student pair with a copy of an article to analyze. If you do have access to the Internet, some good sources of articles are:

- <http://www.consumerreports.org>
- <http://www.zillions.org>
- <http://www.troubleshooter.com>

When students have had time to conduct their analysis, form groups of six and have the pairs in each group share their work. Conduct a class discussion of what students learned through this exercise. Use such questions as the following to prompt discussion:

- Which quality was represented in most articles?
- Which quality was least represented?
- Which quality was hardest to judge?
- Which purchase factors were covered most often? Least often? Why do you think this is true?

Tell students that in the next class period, they will begin working on their own consumer reporter assignment. As they complete the assignment, they should keep all of the qualities they worked with in this lesson in mind.

EXTENSION

Invite a local consumer journalist or advocate to class to discuss their work with students. Prepare students in advance by having them develop questions they want to ask the visitor. If possible, students should examine some of the visitor's work before the visit.

Have students investigate the link between advertising and consumer information. Often, advertisers present information designed to look helpful to consumers while actually serving as a selling tool. An example is a food product labeled as "low carb" or "lite." Infomercials may be another example.



Buying a Soccer Ball: What's the Story Behind the Ball?

Do you get a kick out of soccer? Millions of Americans do. In 2001, 2.9 million Americans under the age of 19 were signed up to play soccer through school or in an organized league. Millions more play just for fun.

While you don't need a lot of equipment to get started playing soccer, you do need a soccer ball. Buying a soccer ball may seem easy, but there are lots of factors to consider when you make that decision. Of course, you think about price, but quality and who made the ball are also factors worth considering.

Price

If you have \$10 in your pocket, you can buy a soccer ball. However, you could spend as much as \$150 on a soccer ball. What makes the difference? The materials used, how the ball is made, and who makes the ball are all factors that contribute to the price.

Materials

How many parts do you think a soccer ball has? Unless you've cut open a soccer ball to look inside, you may not know that a soccer ball has three major parts: the cover, the lining, and the bladder.

The cover is the outside of the ball. While soccer balls used to be made of leather, the leather soaked up too much moisture. Today, the cover is usually made of PVC (poly vinyl carbonate), PU (Polyurethane), or a PVC/PU mix.

- PVC is less expensive than PU. It's tough and lasts a long time, but players don't like the "feel" of the ball. It feels hard and is harder to control.
- PU is more expensive. It is softer and allows the player to control the ball better. It is also a "lively" material with good bounce. However, it gets scuffed easily and won't last as long as a PVC ball.

Soccer balls with a cover made of a PVC/PU mix combine some of the benefits of both materials. They last longer than PU balls and have a better feel than PVC balls. Their price falls between that of PVC and PU balls.

The lining helps the ball hold its shape. The lining is usually made of polyester and cotton. Higher quality soccer balls use more layers of lining and combine polyester and cotton; cheaper soccer balls have fewer layers and may only use polyester.

The bladder holds the air in the ball and contributes to both durability and performance. Bladders are usually made of latex or butyl. A latex bladder will make the ball softer, meaning that it has a better "feel." Players believe that they can better control the flight of a ball with a latex bladder. However, latex doesn't hold air long, so a ball with a latex bladder has to be pumped up often.

Buying a Soccer Ball: What's the Story Behind the Ball?

A bladder made of butyl is harder and doesn't have to be pumped up very often, but players think it is harder to play with. Doing a header with a ball having a butyl bladder can hurt!

As you can tell from this brief discussion, quality is complicated when it comes to the materials used in a soccer ball. The materials that last longest may not be the ones that give the best performance. One measure of quality is the FIFA stamp on a soccer ball. FIFA is the Federation Internationale de Football Association, the group that sponsors the World Cup. A FIFA stamp on a ball means that the ball can pass certain tests—how well it holds its shape, for example.

How the Ball Is Made

Soccer balls have anywhere from 18 to 32 panels. Expert kickers say that fewer panels allow them to curve the ball more when they are kicked. Beginners probably won't notice such differences, so the best ball for you may depend on how good you are and what you want to achieve.

Panels may either be stitched or glued onto the lining. Cheaper balls are usually glued. Glue provides a harder feel when kicking the ball. More expensive soccer balls are hand stitched, while medium-priced balls are machine sewn.

Who Makes the Ball

The city of Sialkot in Pakistan is the sports equipment manufacturing capital of the world. Many families in Sialkot struggle to make enough money to live on. Because wages are so low and the people's Islamic beliefs do not allow women and men to work together in the factories, many of these families send their children to work making soccer balls and other sports equipment.

People concerned about child labor and other workers have been trying to change the way in which sports equipment is made. Some companies in Pakistan are beginning to apply fair trade criteria in their factories. They do not allow child workers. They pay a fair wage. Some have even established separate facilities where only women work. Thus, part of the work—often the stitching of the soccer balls—can be done by women. This allows mothers to contribute to family income instead of having children working. Companies producing fair trade soccer balls also offer emergency and educational services to their workers.

Fair trade soccer balls are a bit more expensive than other soccer balls. Are they worth it? Kick the idea around—only you know what matters most to you.

Journalistic Standards

- 1.** Consumer reporters must report information accurately.
 - They must be as thorough and truthful as possible.
 - They must look for the whole story.

- 2.** Consumer reporters must report information fairly.
 - They try to provide all sides of a story without favoring one side over another.

- 3.** Consumer reporters should act in the best interests of the public.
 - They serve as watchdogs of government, business and other institutions that influence the public.
 - They provide information that people can use in their role as consumers.

- 4.** Consumer reporters must be independent.
 - They cannot accept gifts or favors from people or companies they write about.

Is It a Good Article?

In the list below, write in the qualities of good consumer reporting your class agreed on.

1. To what extent does the article reflect the qualities of good consumer reporting:

a. Quality 1: _____

Totally reflects the quality	5	4	3	2	1	Does not reflect the quality at all
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b. Quality 2: _____

Totally reflects the quality	5	4	3	2	1	Does not reflect the quality at all
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c. Quality 3: _____

Totally reflects the quality	5	4	3	2	1	Does not reflect the quality at all
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d. Quality 4 : _____

Totally reflects the quality	5	4	3	2	1	Does not reflect the quality at all
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e. Quality 5: _____

Totally reflects the quality	5	4	3	2	1	Does not reflect the quality at all
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2. Which of the factors important to consumers are covered in the article?

- _____ Price
- _____ Quality
- _____ Healthfulness/Safety
- _____ Brand name
- _____ Certification from a government or other agency
- _____ Where the product was produced
- _____ Who produced the product
- _____ How the product was produced

Performance Assessment: On Assignment



INTRODUCTION

After you have completed one or more lessons from the other units, you may wish to assess the students' learning by having them write an article for people buying flowers, coffee or bananas. A scoring guide is provided to remind students of what quality work looks like and to aid teachers in grading.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Synthesize facts they have researched to provide relevant and coherent guidance about an assigned product.
- Adhere to qualities of good consumer reporting in writing a consumer article.

STANDARDS

Depending on the focus of their articles, students will address an array of geography and economics standards in this lesson. They will also address the following language arts standards:

Language Arts

- **Standard 3:** Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate texts.
- **Standard 4:** Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- “Scoring Guide” handout
- “Review Guide” handout
- “Consumer Survey” handout (post-test)

PROCEDURE

1. Review the Assignment and Scoring Guide

Tell students that they are going to be completing the assignment they were given at the beginning of the unit: writing an article to provide information to people who buy flowers, coffee, or bananas.

Distribute the “Scoring Guide.” Explain that it describes what you will be looking for in their articles. Explain that students will write their articles individually, but that they will have an opportunity to prepare in groups. They can ask classmates for input/feedback on their articles as they work.

2. Prepare in Small Groups

Ask students to return to their groups (flowers, coffee or bananas). The groups should examine the information they have compiled, using the “Review Guide” handout. Allow time for students to conduct some additional research to attempt to answer those questions and to share the results of their research.

3. Write Articles

Allow time (either in class or as homework) for students to write their articles.

EXTENSION

Administer the “Consumer Survey” post-test (same as the pre-test). Create a chart comparing answers on the pre-test and post-test. Have the factors that they consider in making a purchase changed?



Scoring Guide

A good article will reach the goals in the first column below. The items in the second column describe what your teacher will look for in determining whether or not your article meets the goals.

GOALS	EVIDENCE	POINTS
Article demonstrates understanding of the factors consumers should consider when making purchasing decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discuss issues that affect the people who produce the product. ■ Discuss issues related to resources and the environment. ■ Discuss at least one additional factor consumers should consider. 	50
Article presents all sides of the issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify alternatives for consumers. ■ Present the costs and benefits of alternatives. 	20
Article reflects research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use appropriate evidence and examples from reading and research to support points. ■ Combine information from several types of sources. ■ Cite sources. 	10
Article communicates information effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adjust use of language to meet the needs of the audience. ■ Use a clear organizational structure. ■ Use vivid language, examples, and visuals to draw readers into the article and keep them interested. ■ Follow language conventions (i.e., use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar). 	20

Review Guide

With your group, review all the information you have gathered about your product. Use the following questions to guide your work.

1. Which of your initial questions have been answered? Post the answers so everyone in your group can see them when they write their articles.

2. Which of your initial questions have not been answered?

3. What additional questions do you now have?

Divide the unanswered and new questions among group members. Group members should research their assigned questions and report back to the group.

Consumer Survey (post-test)

This survey is designed to gather information about the things you feel are important when you make a purchasing decision. Please answer honestly.

Imagine that you are going to the store to buy an item. It can be any type of item, such as a chocolate bar or a car. There are many different types of this item for sale. Which of the following do you consider in deciding which one to buy? Check all that you consider.

- Price
- Quality
- Healthfulness/Safety¹
- Brand name
- Certification from a government or other agency
- Where the product was produced
- Who produced the product
- How the product was produced²

When you decide which item to buy, who might be affected by your decision?
List as many groups as you can.