



# What is a Reader Supposed to Think?

In *Merchants of Doubt*, Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway establish that there is a pattern of common tactics and strategies used by some individuals and groups to fight “the scientific evidence and spread confusion on many of the most important issues of our time” (9). But how is a reader supposed to identify when this smoke-screen of confusion and doubt is being used or when what they are reading or hearing is it legitimate skepticism. How is a reader supposed to be able to judge between credible opinion based upon legitimate information and opinion that seeks to promote disinformation and propaganda?

For Essay #4, you will find a newspaper opinion piece related to an issue where there is some scientific consensus or controversy. The article may involve an issue of regulation, but behind it is an issue of science. Your task is to determine from close analysis and research of this article whether a reader should believe this article’s opinion or discount it. Then, from your analysis you will present an argument/persuasion essay convincing us to either believe and take this article seriously or not believe it and be wary of it as propaganda? To make this argument, you should use what you have learned about the tactics of merchandising doubt and propaganda from *Merchants of Doubt* in your paper.

**The Essay Question for this essay will be something like this:**

- Should readers believe this author and this article or not?
- Is this article a legitimate opinion or a piece of propaganda?
- Is this article a work presenting legitimate information to help us make an informed decision and come to an informed decision? Or is this article purposefully working to fight scientific evidence and spread confusion?
- What is a reader supposed to think about this article?

## **Essay Requirements:**

This essay should be 1000-1250 word argument/persuasion essay that incorporates a minimum of FIVE research sources. A minimum of three of these sources need to be from the SAC Library databases (such as MasterFile or LexusNexus Complete). The essay should be correctly documented using MLA Documentation Style and in MLA Manuscript Format.

## **Choosing Your Article**

You should choose an opinion piece of substantial length published in a newspaper. It could be a “pro-science” based article or a “doubt-science” based article (see the examples on the next page). You can find an opinion piece on a historical topic described in *Merchants of Doubt* like smoking, acid rain, or nuclear winter. You could also take on an editorial related to the current topic of climate change, but there are other current issues that have science at the heart of them like sugar, genetically modified crops, pharmaceuticals, or pesticides.

## **Researching Your Article**

Your first and most important task will be to read your article closely and research what it is talking about. Fact-check its information and claims. Research the author and uncover his or her credentials and past history (perhaps related to this issue or others). Can you detect any bias that this author might have? What might be his or her motives or agenda? Can you identify tactics of merchandising doubt or other logical fallacies at work? Or does his or her logic hold true? Research the references the author makes or any sort of outside sources that support his or her case. How credible are these sources?

