How Private Is Your Private Life?
Magazine Article by Andrea Rock

The Privacy Debate: One Size Doesn’t Fit All
Newspaper Editorial by Arthur M. Ahalt

Is PRIVACY an illusion?

Your phone number appears in a hundred databases. Your favorite Web site keeps track of your every click. Do these advances in technology pose a threat to your privacy? Big Brother (along with 30 of his closest friends) may be watching you.

DEBATE With a small group, break into two teams and stage a debate over the question of personal privacy in today’s society. Is your privacy at risk, or isn’t it? Be prepared to back up your opinions with examples and other evidence.
**TEXT ANALYSIS: FACT AND OPINION**

Most persuasive writers use facts and opinions to support their claims. A **fact** is a statement that can be proved, or verified. An **opinion** is a statement that cannot be proved because it expresses a person’s beliefs, feelings, or thoughts. It’s important to distinguish facts from opinions because facts tend to be less disputable than opinions—unless the opinions come from experts and are well **substantiated**, or established by evidence. Can you distinguish the fact from opinion here?

*The constant invasion of our privacy is an outrage.*

*According to a 1999 Wall Street Journal poll, loss of privacy is the number-one concern of Americans.*

The first statement is an opinion. The second is a fact; it can be proved by consulting the 1999 *Wall Street Journal* poll.

As you read each of the following texts, identify the significant facts and opinions in a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Fact/Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lines 2–3</td>
<td>A 1999 poll found that loss of privacy is the number-one concern of Americans.</td>
<td>Fact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**READING SKILL: RECOGNIZE BIAS**

**Bias** is an unfair preference for or against a particular topic or issue. To detect bias, be on the lookout for the following:

- an argument in which the evidence is unbalanced, giving one side stronger or more adequate support than the other
- the presence of **loaded language**—words with intensely positive or negative connotations
- opinions stated as if they were facts
- the use of overgeneralizations, such as **stereotyping**, and other faulty reasoning (See *Reading Handbook*, page R24.)

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

Which of the following words can be used to discuss

- the promotion of a cause?
- something unsettling?
- an unbiased discussion?
- a skilled talker?

**Word List**

- affiliate
- anonymity
- advocacy
- awry
- browser
- articulate
- nonpartisan
- pervasive
- disconcerting
- surveillance

Complete the activities in your *Reader/Writer Notebook.*
How Private Is Your Private Life?

ANDREA ROCK
When you go online, file an insurance claim or even eat out, you reveal personal information to strangers. Here’s what you need to know about who’s watching you—and how to protect yourself.

Rapid advances in technology have fostered an ever-growing assault on our private lives. A 1999 Wall Street Journal poll found that loss of privacy ranked as Americans’ number-one concern for the new century—ahead of depression, war and terrorism.

Regulators and lawmakers alike have proposed measures to safeguard privacy, but they face strong opposition from businesses whose aim is to collect as much information as possible about consumers’ financial and medical histories, their shopping habits and other personal details. Companies profit by selling this information to advertisers and other businesses, or simply by using it to tailor their own advertising.

To find out how pervasive the system really is, the editors of LHJ asked me to see how often in a single day my activities resulted in a legal invasion of privacy. I was surprised by what I learned:

9:00 A.M.
After sending my two sons off to school, I go to the grocery store. At the register, I hand the cashier my supermarket discount card. Later, I discover that this card allows retailers to track exactly what I’ve purchased, how much I spend and how often I shop. These details can then be shared with product manufacturers so that coupons and other offers can be targeted to me. “People should be aware that when they use these cards, they are literally selling their privacy,” says Ari Schwartz, senior policy analyst at the Center for Democracy and Technology, an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C. Schwartz adds that his group has already seen cases where these records have been used in lawsuits.

9:25 A.M.
After returning a video, I stop at the post office to mail an insurance claim form. Amazingly, the privacy of my video-rental records is protected by federal law, but not the data in my medical records. By signing the claim form, I authorize doctors to release sensitive information about myself to insurers and other third parties, such as the Medical Information Bureau, which keeps records of health problems reported on some insurance applications and informs insurers (on request) about pre-existing conditions.

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1. editors of LHJ: The author was given this assignment by the editors of Ladies’ Home Journal.
2. release sensitive information . . . other third parties: Congress attempted to address this problem by passing the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which makes the unauthorized release of medical information a crime.
Although my medical records can be shared with people I don’t know, in about half the states in the U.S., I don’t have the legal right to see them myself. 

10:00 A.M.

I call the car dealer about the 1997 Subaru I just purchased. When I register a car or apply for a driver’s license in New York, my name, address, date of birth and the model of my car may be sold to marketers, private investigators and others who access the state’s database. Policies may vary by state, with some selling Social Security numbers, too.

The federal Driver’s Privacy Protection Act of 1994 requires application forms to inform consumers that personal information may be disclosed to third parties and that they must be given an opportunity to prohibit such disclosures.

FACT AND OPINION

How could the statement in lines 41–43 be verified?

SERIES OF EVENTS

By line 34, you have followed the author through two time periods in her day. How does this chronological presentation of her interactions with technology develop her argument about the loss of privacy?
**10:20 A.M.**
On my way into New York City to meet a friend for lunch, I save time by paying the toll with my E-Z Pass, a radio tag that deducts the toll from my account. But using the pass means that a record of my travels is being kept. While it can help track criminals, the data could also be used to legally obtain personal information about law-abiding citizens.

**11:30 A.M.**
As I’m waiting to cross the corner of 45th Street and Fifth Avenue, I’m being filmed by a hidden video camera. At twenty-second intervals, the device transmits the images onto an Internet site. The camera is operated by a private company simply for the use of promotional purposes and entertainment on its Web site, but **surveillance** cameras are increasingly being used by police and merchants to fight crime, as well.

**NOON**
My friend Diane joins me at Daniel, a lovely French restaurant. In my research, I found out that tiny cameras strategically positioned in the

“By the end of the decade, I imagine most public places will have surveillance cameras connected to a computer that spontaneously compares faces shown on a monitor with mug shots of people wanted by the police,” says John Pike, a security analyst at the Federation of American Scientists, a private policy group in Washington D.C.

**Language Coach**

**Word Definitions** You often have to read several definitions in a dictionary to find the one that fits. Reread lines 55–57. Which definition fits the use of **spontaneously** in this quotation? (1) impulsively, (2) automatically, (3) instinctively
ceiling allow the chefs to watch diners eating so that they can time their
delivery of the courses. The food is delicious, but it’s disconcerting to
know that every bite I take is being filmed.

Diane tells me that a friend of hers just received a ticket by mail for
running a red light six months earlier in Los Angeles. A police surveillance
camera caught the license plate of the rental car, which the authorities used
to track down his name and address.

1:30 P.M.
I use Diane’s cell phone to leave a message for a friend, aware that my
conversation could be intercepted by someone with a radio receiver. Says
Pike: “If you are discussing something highly sensitive that you wouldn’t
want your prying neighbor or worst enemy to know, don’t have that
collection on a cell or portable phone.”

4:00 P.M.
After I check my e-mail on my home-office computer, my older son,
Adam, visits a site that provides all the research he needs for his fifth-grade
science project. I feel much more comfortable about his use of the Internet
now that a new federal law prohibits commercial Web sites from collecting personal information from children under thirteen without parental consent.

6:11 p.m.

I use online banking services to see if a recent deposit has been credited to my account. When I first signed up for this service, I was instructed to use my Social Security number as my customer access code. I avoid giving out that number when possible, but in this case, I had no choice. The bank protects my account information from hackers and other unauthorized third parties, but it does share that data with inside affiliates, such as brokerage partners.3

Consumer advocates say financial privacy has been further endangered by a federal law that made it easier for banks to merge with other financial firms, such as brokerages and insurance companies. Though the law includes provisions to protect consumer privacy, critics say there are loopholes that could lead, for example, to a bank denying a loan to a customer because its health-insurance affiliate’s data reveals that he or she is being treated for a life-threatening illness.

9:35 p.m.

When I visit Amazon.com to check out a book, a message on my computer screen says that the Web site is trying to place a “cookie,” a tag that identifies me to an Internet company whenever I visit its site, on my hard drive. Normally, consumers don’t receive this alert, but I’ve learned how to activate a feature on my computer’s browser that will warn me every time a cookie is about to be placed, giving me the option of accepting it or not. Adam and I have visited eleven Web sites today, accumulating forty-nine cookies in all.

Cookies can give you more than you bargained for. A Web site may share its data with an ad network, such as DoubleClick, which places banner ads on more than 1,800 Web sites. An online profile of you is created, which associates your computer with any sites you visit on that ad network, noting what you look at or buy. Your profile continues to expand and can be sold to anyone without your knowledge or consent. Visiting a gardening Web site just to learn about varieties of roses might trigger a deluge of seed catalogs in your mailbox later.

10:45 p.m.

To wrap up, I return to my Excite home page to read my horoscope. “Your home is your castle,” it says, “and you are the supreme ruler within its walls.” After today, I’m not so sure.

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3. brokerage partners: individuals or companies that buy and sell stocks or other assets for others.
The Privacy Debate

One Size Doesn’t Fit All

“One man’s justice is another man’s injustice,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson, neatly summarizing the complexity of most debates.

Unfortunately, the current debate over privacy issues rarely illuminates both sides of this complex issue. Instead, we are told there should be no debate over the need for privacy.

This article will explore the other side of the privacy debate and demonstrate the benefit of access and openness, particularly in the area of public records.

As a retired state circuit court judge with 17 years on the bench, I’ve observed firsthand the benefits to our judicial, government and economic systems of open access to public records. Unfortunately, too many Americans seem willing to reduce such access in the name of privacy.

Why is the siren call\(^1\) of privacy so strong?

Maybe it stems from the impersonal nature of modern society, lack of community and the rise of the global economy, all of which makes us wish for more anonymity. There now are 280 million Americans, and we’re long past doing business at the corner store where everybody knew your name.

Maybe technology is to blame, with credit cards and consumer information automated to move consumers from the practical obscurity of paper records to huge computer databases.

Maybe it’s some politicians, the media and any number of self-styled advocates and experts who traffic in scare headlines, breathless press releases and emotional soapbox speeches. It’s no mystery—privacy concerns affect articulate middle class citizens who buy papers and vote—creating a “squeaky” wheel that gets the grease.

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1. siren call: alluring but possibly dangerous appeal (after the Sirens, mythological creatures whose irresistible songs lured sailors into danger).
Privacy is also a nonpartisan concern which neither political party owns, and represents an issue where conservatives and liberals often meet in unison. Media stories about privacy issues often are human-interest heart-tuggers that sell and gather an audience. Think tanks, clearinghouses and “experts” flock to issue press releases, hold seminars, appear on television and generally stoke the fires of paranoia and emotionalism.

In this atmosphere, confusion, fear and concern replace a balanced view of the privacy issue.

Politicians and the media quote polls—“93 percent of people are concerned about privacy.” Well, no doubt. (I would like to know about the 7 percent who are not concerned about privacy, but that is another matter.) Those polls, however, don’t appear to probe the trade-offs, such as “would you prefer a bank loan in three days or three months?” Most Americans not only prefer to obtain immediate credit and debt, they demand it.

But instant credit and debt is more than a convenience; it’s also the very basis of the underlying strength and power of our economic system, which moves at the speed of light as a direct result of the transparency of information available to economic decision makers. Car, home and bank loans and the issuance of credit and debit cards can be made quickly because information about most of us is available. It’s the source of our

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2. **think tanks, clearinghouses**: A think tank is a research institute organized to investigate social problems; a clearinghouse is an organization that collects and distributes information.

3. **stoke the fires of paranoia**: increase fear and suspicion.
There are real problems that affect real people in the privacy arena, but it’s the classic case of bad news always selling, and good news remaining invisible.

Each day, billions of financial transactions occur in our economy. Do some go awry? Of course, but it is a small percentage. Unfortunately, no one wants to read a headline “Today 299,999,033 Americans Did Not Suffer Privacy-Related Problems.”

There is also a need to segment privacy from one huge ball of confusion into separate, more manageable and different issues, which require different approaches.

Tracking Internet surfing and purchases is different from identity theft, which is different from telemarketing calls, which is different from access to public records, which is also different from the use of Social Security numbers as a unique identifier.

Privacy supporters would have us believe that “one size fits all” when it comes to addressing matters of privacy.

I hold no portfolio on some of these issues, but as one who now is working directly in the area of public records accessibility, I am vitally concerned about access to these records and their contents.

Remember the old adage when you hear self-styled privacy experts expound on the need to keep information hidden: “for every problem, there is a simple solution, which is usually wrong.”

GRAMMAR AND STYLE
Reread lines 106–119. By using a series of infinitive phrases, the author establishes a parallel structure that emphasizes the benefits of open access to information.

FACT AND OPINION
Is the author stating a fact or expressing an opinion in lines 133–137? How do you know?

Language Coach
Oral Fluency Part of fluent reading is correct pronunciation. Words from French ending in -que, like technique and antique, end with a hard /k/ sound. Reread lines 138–145, and say the word that follows this rule.

awry (ə-ˈar-ē) adj. off course; wrong
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  According to the author of “How Private Is Your Private Life?” what happens when a driver uses an E-Z Pass to pay a toll?

2. **Clarify**  In the context of the Internet, what is a *cookie*?

3. **Summarize**  According to the author of “The Privacy Debate: One Size Doesn’t Fit All,” how do we benefit from sacrificing some part of our privacy?

Text Analysis

4. **Distinguish Fact from Opinion**  Review the chart you filled in as you read. Does Andrea Rock rely more on fact or opinion in making her case? What about Arthur M. Ahalt? Do the opinions you identified tend to be substantiated? Cite evidence from the texts to support your answers.

5. **Analyze Argument**  What question does Andrea Rock set out to explore? What conclusions does the bulk of her evidence support? How does she let readers know what she thinks by the end of her research day?

6. **Analyze Bias**  Any piece of persuasive writing is likely to reflect the bias of its author. Which of the two articles do you think reflects a stronger bias? Support your answer with evidence from the texts.

7. **Identify Modes of Reasoning**  The process of piecing together facts and other evidence to arrive at a logical conclusion or generalization is called *inductive reasoning*. Which of the two arguments you just read reaches its conclusion using inductive reasoning? Explain. (To learn more about inductive reasoning, see *Reading Handbook*, pages R22–R23.)

8. **Compare Texts**  Which article do you find more convincing, and why?

9. **Make Judgments**  How have these articles helped shape your thinking on the privacy issue? What does your reading experience suggest about the role that magazine articles and newspaper editorials can serve in civic life? Explain your answer.

*Is PRIVACY an illusion?*

What steps do you regularly take to ensure your privacy?
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

Choose the word that is not related in meaning to the other words.

1. awry, amiss, assemble, astray
2. namelessness, disguise, anonymity, fretfulness
3. distressing, embarrassing, disconcerting, inspiring
4. electrician, browser, plumber, carpenter
5. pervasive, widespread, arrogant, extensive
6. enemy, associate, affiliate, partner
7. broadcasting, spying, observing, surveillance
8. impartial, uneasy, nonpartisan, unbiased
9. articulate, illogical, eloquent, expressive
10. rejection, advocacy, rebuff, disdain

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING**

- coherent  
- differentiate  
- evident  
- relevant  
- technique

Decide whether the arguments these two writers make about privacy are **relevant** to your life. In a paragraph or two, state your opinion and support it with evidence and a **coherent** argument. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: INTERNET WORDS**

You often hear Internet terms, whether in computer class or in your daily interactions, but do you know what they actually mean? Some terms, like the vocabulary word *browser* (a word that can be traced back to an Indo-European base), are common words used in specialized ways. Other terms are unique to discussion of the Internet. To be Web literate, you need a working knowledge of basic Internet terms.

**PRACTICE** With a partner, write definitions for each term, and check them in a current dictionary or Web site glossary. Then list three other Internet terms you think your classmates should know, and define them.

1. server  
2. portal  
3. hyperlink  
4. Webcast  
5. site map  
6. wireless fidelity
Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Use Rhetorical Devices

Review the Grammar and Style note on page 690. Parallelism—the use of similar grammatical constructions to express ideas that are related or equal in importance—can add rhythm or emphasis to speech or writing. In the following example from “The Privacy Debate: One Size Doesn’t Fit All,” notice how the author uses a series of adjective clauses, all beginning with “which is,” to emphasize how privacy needs differ:

Tracking Internet surfing and purchases is different from identity theft, which is different from telemarketing calls, which is different from access to public records, which is also different from the use of Social Security numbers as a unique identifier. (lines 138–145)

Now study the model. Notice how the revisions in blue add emphasis to the writer’s ideas. Revise your response to the prompt below by using parallel structures.

STUDENT MODEL

You speak to the benefits of sharing public records. However, I feel you do not sufficiently explore the problems, such as identity theft. Why do you fail to mention identity theft? Why do you fail to allude to identity theft, but do not mention how many lives it has ruined.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION

Explore the arguments presented in “How Private is Your Private Life?” and “The Privacy Debate: One Size Doesn’t Fit All” by responding to this prompt. Then use the revising tip to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Extended Constructed Response: Critique
Write a letter to one of the authors in which you explain how his or her piece could be made more convincing. In your critique, write three to five paragraphs describing your reaction to the article and your suggestions for improvement. Make sure your critique goes beyond a mere summary and includes your feelings and observations about the piece.

REVISIING TIP

Review your critique. Did you use parallelism to add rhythm and/or emphasis to your letter? If not, revise your response.