Data is not Truth

Truth vs truth

Are we seeking the truth?

- What is truth?

- Are we seeking pure truth?

- If not, what are we seeking?

- Knowledge, data, information

- That brings in epistemology

Epistemology: How we know what we know.

What does this have to do with journalism? Doubt.

In class

- Group 1: Is the unemployment rate accurate? Why or why not?
- Group 2: What, exactly, is Lincoln's population? Is it accurate? Why or why not?

Group reports

Why talk about this? Because it determines how we write.

What are numbers?

- Numbers tell you what.

- Numbers rarely tell you why.

- What do you want to know? Why.

Writing with numbers

- Use ratios instead of percents

- 6 of 10, 2 of 5, etc.

- Use the exact number only when the exact number is the story.

- Examples: Murders. Lincoln's population.

Writing with numbers

- More than, not over.

- About, not around.

- About, not approximately

Writing with numbers

- Use numbers to illustrate

- "As compared to what?"

- A compared to B. Approvals to denials. This versus the average.

For your enrichment

- Read: The dirty little secret that data journalists aren't telling you