

Appendix II: Selected¹ Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions

Were there any other things that led you to read messages in your dialogue group?	2
Were there any other reasons that you may have had for not reading messages?	2
Were there any other things that led you to write or post messages in your dialogue group?	3
Were there any other reasons that you may have had for not writing messages? 4	
What did you like most about Reality Check?	4
What did you like least about Reality Check?	7
Did your participation in Reality Check change your view of the Internet or the World Wide Web? If so, how?	8
In what ways do you think your participation in Reality Check improved your communication skills, either online or in face-to-face situations?	10
In what ways did your participation in Reality Check change the way you think about conversations with other people, either online or face-to-face?.....	13
Is there anything you'd like to add about your experience with Reality Check? .	14

¹ Responses selected to reflect a variety of perspectives. Duplicate and repetitive responses were not included.

Were there any other things that led you to read messages in your dialogue group?

- ◆ A few of the folks were really quite interesting and well-informed people who were worth listening to.
- ◆ Catchy subject heading.
- ◆ Curiosity about how others would respond to particular posts, whether mine or not.
- ◆ Desire to help generate a discussion that worked, that drew in numerous people and generated good ideas.
- ◆ I felt a certain level of camaraderie after a while, as though the other posters were old friends.
- ◆ I felt that I was part of something that was exciting and stimulating, plus I learned a lot from the different viewpoints offered by each of the participants.
- ◆ I felt the group was pretty one-sided (pro Clinton) and I kept hoping there were other opinions.
- ◆ I wanted to hear other opinions and hopefully have thoughtful dialogue beyond the usual levels and topics portrayed in the news.
- ◆ I was amazed at the amount of information on history/politics that the group shared.
- ◆ I wanted to see how many dropped out and why.
- ◆ It's more than frustration with the media. The media was saturated with this story so that the average citizens would not think of other, more important matters; you could say weapons of mass distraction. The public dialogue is mostly entertainment and I thought that Reality Check would require more pure thinking. Remember Fred Friendly, he said "I am going to make the agony of decision making so unbearable and difficult, that you can only escape by thinking". I think that reading what appears in our media requires no thinking, and I was tired of being not so subtly manipulated.
- ◆ Many of the writers in my group offered thoughtful, considered and oftentimes humorous thoughts on subjects. That made it a pleasure to read.
- ◆ Members giving reference to areas on the web or in a document would cause me to at times search out these statements or reference material.
- ◆ There were some scholarly people who offered historical contexts, and I was very interested in their posts. I was more interested at the beginning, but after a while, I thought, "Okay, so what?"
- ◆ This was fascinating. I was reading and contributing in an atmosphere that was like a salon.

Were there any other reasons that you may have had for not reading messages?

- ◆ A lot of the discussions were not at all relevant to my life in the UK. I did look at setting up RCUK, but it never really got off the ground.
- ◆ Biggest nuisance in entire process was that software didn't track read vs unread messages, making it difficult to get to "new" ones. I eventually dropped out as threads got longer and longer.
- ◆ I don't mind being attacked, if I constructive attack. This was one of my first experiences and I hate to say this though I did say it there, I felt more at home in other more shall we say ethnically friendly places on the web than I did at Reality Check. In my group few people responded, so I tended to post longer messages because I felt that longer messages actually got into more depth than a few sentences. For me the whole impeachment thing was typically American sensationalist, and shallow. Newsmedia coverage was that as well. Reality Check was touted as a way to go beyond that, mostly it didn't or very few people were willing to "go there".
- ◆ I felt many of the group had already exhausted the topic and were WAY beyond me. 😊

Were there any other reasons that you may have had for not reading messages?

- ◆ I got a late start; after signing up, I checked my e-mail daily for more than a week without getting a group assignment. Then, after not checking for a couple of days, I found my group was already well underway. I was already behind, and the prospect of reading everything became overwhelming. I posted a couple of messages without ever reading all preexisting messages, but as I got further behind, feeling frustrated, I lost enthusiasm for trying to participate.
- ◆ Many of the more active discussions seemed to be based on irrational or irrelevant ideas. Most people seemed to have fixed ideological stances which they wanted to advertise more than they wanted to participate in free-wheeling discourse. (Though most seemed quite polite throughout.)
- ◆ Primarily because so many threads developed. I tended to track one or two that interested me and ignore the rest – or only glance at them occasionally. More than one thread devolved into a debate between two members with others kibitzing. If the menu showed a lot of posts by one or two members in a thread, I tended to skip it.
- ◆ Same old drive!
- ◆ some members bickered
- ◆ Some of the messages were too wordy. I know you can't edit (and shouldn't) but some guidelines might be helpful. Instruction to "be concise" etc.
- ◆ The branching of topics made it hard to keep up with where one person was posting. For example, one person there had some very interesting points of view, but I had trouble finding that person's posts, due to the new topic headings allowed by the site. Instead of allowing multiple topics to be added by users, perhaps you could break it down into a set number of sub-topics to be used. This does not limit what can be discussed, as all forms of dialogue run the gamut, but it would make it easier to find things.
- ◆ The group was doing such a fine job, I was not 'needed.'
- ◆ Too much bickering.
- ◆ When people were off topic and rambling or ranting about their personal feelings toward other group members or their own problems. This happened about 5 or 6 times.

Were there any other things that led you to write or post messages in your dialogue group?

- ◆ A strong point that I wanted to applaud or counter.
- ◆ A wonderful opportunity to bounce my ideas off of a diverse group of folks I would not normally have encountered.
- ◆ Ego.
- ◆ Extreme shame.
- ◆ I felt compelled to write a message when someone else had written something that I unequivocally disagreed with.
- ◆ I felt we knee-jerk liberals were underrepresented.
- ◆ I have a big mouth and am extremely opinionated and concerned about the direction our world is taking. I want to make a difference. As well, I am an essayist and poet who gets published quite a bit in editorial pages including Time Magazine and Tokyo papers. I wanted to share what I was thinking in the hopes of stimulating other thinking as well. Their thinking also helped me clarify issues I had not come to a conclusion on as of yet.
- ◆ I never actually felt that I was in a dialogue with anyone. But I was interested in "seeing what I thought" after writing and seeing if that was of interest to anyone else.
- ◆ I personally wanted to change the focus to other subjects, and open up new issues. I thought that I had a better grasp of Constitutional issues than most in the group. It was not a learning experience for me, it was rather, a teaching one, albeit filled with pleasure at times.

Were there any other things that led you to write or post messages in your dialogue group?

- ◆ I posted in an attempt to understand others views. I wanted input to empathize with feelings that were completely foreign to me.
- ◆ I posted when I had a definite opinion to express regarding the subject, or a view pro or con the posting of another member.
- ◆ I wanted to test out reactions to views that may be controversial.
- ◆ information I had discovered from other sources.
- ◆ lack of complete coverage in media sources including print and electronic
- ◆ Some people had obvious misconceptions which I felt I could clear up; sometimes I had misconceptions (not obvious, of course) which I had to thank them for clearing up.
- ◆ Sometimes I felt called on to add to someone else's post.
- ◆ Sometimes I read posts from other groups and brought up the same topics in my group.
- ◆ to protect or help others or calm down situations. to spread the message of love.
- ◆ When I was responding to a message from someone that wrongly characterized one of my previous positions.
- ◆ when someone directly inquired about my response

Were there any other reasons that you may have had for not writing messages?

- ◆ At first I felt a bit intimidated because many of the people in the group were much more educated than me. This passed after I discovered I was able to hold my own.
- ◆ There was too much emotion as opposed to facts. There was a bit of defensive behaviour and I got the feeling about 50% of the time that the others did not have a truly open mind. Most questions have more than two sides, and holding on to the debate model only polarizes the postings instead of framing them as other than a fight or a debate. The absence of a moderator was a real plus.
- ◆ Very American discussions. Rarely discussed international or wider issues.

What did you like most about Reality Check?

- ◆ a broad spectrum of folks tossed in together to create a community
- ◆ A chance to voice my opinions.
- ◆ Accessibility. It was nice to be able to read whole threads. The folk were reasonable and intelligent. I think reality check is a good vehicle, but the real value is the members. Hence, the quality can be rather serendipitous.
- ◆ Being able to discuss issues with people of opposing views in a respectful manner. I also liked the opportunity to really think before answering a question or expressing my opinion.
- ◆ Being able to talk freely about politics, and to be listened to and responded to.
- ◆ breadth of people
- ◆ By and large, the posts were thoughtful
- ◆ Community AND individuality
- ◆ Discussing ideas with people who were intelligent and were interested in discussing ideas.
- ◆ Discussing in a fairly sane manner issues of importance with people from all over the United States.
- ◆ Finding out what other people thought about the topics.

What did you like most about Reality Check?

- ◆ First of all, the interface itself was awesome; that counted a lot on keeping me coming back to the site. Next were the people who were in the group. I was constantly surprised at the quality of the discussions we had during our time together. Very rarely, if ever did it get boring.
- ◆ Forum members
- ◆ Having the ability to share thoughts and opinions with a variety of others from many back grounds.
- ◆ Hearing new voices express themselves with originality, spontaneity, and healthy disregard for ideology and false dilemma.
- ◆ I appreciated the format which provided us the freedom to express our thoughts and opinions. Most of our members who stayed on were intelligent and truly eager to hear the opinions of others as well as to express their own. Several of us, after lengthy discussion, agreed to disagree. I learned the reasoning behind some people's opinions which I did not share. This gave me a much better understanding of their views.
- ◆ I began with hopeI wanted the concept to succeed, because, I truly feel that in a democracy, you get exactly the government you deserve. With more participation in the political system, you can as an individual have an impact.
- ◆ I enjoy the diverse, yet open idea exchange.
- ◆ I feel the possibilities for this type of discussion group is endless. I enjoyed the time that I spent expressing my views and reading the views of others.
- ◆ I liked having REAL contact with people who cared about issues. Actually that is a rare occurrence.
- ◆ I liked hearing very different opinions, from very different people. There were also very few Europeans in my Group, so it was interesting to hear Americans debate.
- ◆ I liked hearing what people in other parts of the country had to say about Impeachment and other issues.
- ◆ I liked the controlled "membership" of the groups.
- ◆ I liked the idea and the effort to implement it.
- ◆ I liked the informed posts that brought context and information. I liked reading the personal insights and opinions. I liked the exchange and energy of the dialogue. I liked the opportunity to explore my own opinions with the hope that they would be read by a critical and thoughtful audience.
- ◆ I liked the opportunity to blow off steam about political events, particularly the impeachment issue.
- ◆ I liked the variety of individuals in the group. We had a wide range of philosophies, types of people, ideas, etc.
- ◆ I love the interaction I had with my group members. I think that was the best part no matter what we were discussing.
- ◆ I was so fed up and frustrated with the politicians that this was a means of getting it out of my system.
- ◆ In my group, we had a good mix of people of various political persuasions and geographical location which made for interesting insights on the opinions of other areas of the country.
- ◆ It enabled me to have very frank discussions about controversial issues with people who have very different views from my own. In face-to-face conversation with such people, I usually censor myself in the name of "tact."
- ◆ It gave an opportunity to band together with other's who had similar opinions re impeachment, and yet it exposed me to differing points of view. The members of my group may have been biased by the fact that the group was set up immediately after the NPR story, but I was very pleasantly surprised by the generally thoughtful and insightful nature of the discussion.
- ◆ It was nice to be part of a discussion group that did not degenerate into name-calling or flaming.
- ◆ It was the most positive experience I have ever had with a message board. I came to grow rather close to several people that I had not previously known.
- ◆ It was unfiltered.

What did you like most about Reality Check?

- ◆ Just about everything. From the people who were in my dialogue groups (11 and 15) to the very responsive way in which Barry and Mark would answer questions or deal with issues.
- ◆ Novel concept for me.
- ◆ Oddly enough it was the caliber of people. People willing to listen and outline how their thinking differs from yours and recognizing valid view points on both sides of the issues. Plus if we came to the realization we just weren't going to agree, we closed the chapter on that issue and continued on without becoming enemies.
- ◆ Opportunity to 'talk' with others who had similar ideas - I had felt like I was almost alone in my opinions (except for my family).
- ◆ People with unconventional views who would not be allowed to appear in the regular media could participate without their identities being known.
- ◆ RC is a great forum to express ones views on a particular subject to people of most walks of life and persuasions.
- ◆ RC seemed to attract thoughtful people who were interested in ideas being exchanged rather than expounding on their own. This seemed more so in my group (15) than what I read in some of the other groups. May have been coincidence.
- ◆ Reality Check was a wonderful experience compared with chat rooms, newsgroups, or any other type of discussion forum I can think of. One of the main things I liked about it was the fact that the group transcended the subject matter that we had been assigned. We were supposed to talk about impeachment, but dozens of other topics sprouted up spontaneously to the point where I never discussed impeachment at all, but instead focused on all of the other topics of conversation that were taking place.
- ◆ Reality Check's most valuable tool was the allowing of unfiltered and complete thought process in written form. It was also the give and take between group participants. The ability to initiate any discussion was also helpful.
- ◆ Small discussion groups, more time to develop relationships.
- ◆ The "sealed" environment. There was a sense of community as well as accountability for all postings. It functioned well as a think tank, too.
- ◆ The ability to contact and build a dialog with people who held radically different opinions and beliefs.
- ◆ The ability to get feedback from a wide range of people.
- ◆ The civility of the members; the variety of topics we discussed; the interest in and by those who stuck with it...five in our group are still communicating daily via group and private emailings. We've become friends, learning about each other from the inside out.
- ◆ The fact that it was written communication required participants to be more thoughtful about their comments.
- ◆ The fact that the same people contributed from day to day for duration of group ie 8 weeks.
- ◆ the format was very easy to figure out and use. i was also very pleased that people were so cordial and understanding - really worked to understand the other members' viewpoints, not just point out how they were wrong. interesting mix of people - age, location, life experience, etc. I also really liked the fact that it was not in real time - allowed people to participate when they had the time, not at a time dictated by an outside source.
- ◆ The innovation represented by the formulation of the forum. A new endeavor, with unforeseeable consequences.
- ◆ The insight of foreign visitors into American politics and when they added comments about things that have happened in their own countries.
- ◆ The level of intelligence of the group and the lack of animosity if they disagreed.
- ◆ the quality and intensity of the ideas of the participants
- ◆ The quality of dialogue. The cross-section worried me at first because it seemed too weighted toward one extreme, but I realized later that that impression came after only about 20 people had responded out of about 45-50 in the group.

What did you like least about Reality Check?

- ◆ Where did all the people in my discussion group come up with the time to write their responses? I sometimes felt that the group was dominated by a few members who posted the most and longest messages.
- ◆ there were often too many posts to keep up with. i think we had several people in our group who were retired and had a lot of time to devote. i had to participate at work and therefore didn't have as much time. i don't think this is a problem with the set up of reality check, though, just a fact of life.
- ◆ There were few things I didn't like about RC, but the main thing I think was a gradual decrease in group interest as the month wore on. By the end of our time together, not much in the way of new stuff was being posted. I do wish, now, that our group had stuck around enough to discuss Kosovo. That would have been profoundly interesting.
- ◆ There didn't seem to be a true cross section of opinions. It was a one-sided group.
- ◆ The way the titles branched out all the time - it was too easy to get lost in all the posts. It wasn't organized enough within the group's postings to keep track of who was posting where, or what something really pertained to.
- ◆ The server would go down and I'd be unable to receive or respond to the other posts.
- ◆ The sequential listing of posts made it difficult to follow threads.
- ◆ The restriction of discussions to the impeachment. It didn't work though - we started threads on other subjects anyway.
- ◆ the pages were rather slow loading, getting into the page of discussion group took a long time.
- ◆ The overwhelming posters with little courtesy and poor language skills.
- ◆ The marketing of the Reality Check....The people who operate/control/run the thing act as if it is some sort of big deal....I don't see that it is. These exchanges in forums or Bulletin Boards have been going on for some time....I've been participating in one form or another for maybe 10 years, it's not something new or special....interesting, yes...but not that big a deal. I've received an e-mail or two stating that they now have a grant to study the experience of Reality Check participants....why? For what reason? The entire time I was participating and up until now I've gotten the feeling that someone was going to ask for some sort of donation or something similar....What do you have to study? Just run the thing....
- ◆ The group! And, at one point, Marc Weiss - getting snippy with the group participants is simply intolerable, no matter how strongly he may feel he is correct or in the driver's seat.
- ◆ the group rapidly downsized to about six or seven people. I wish there had been a way to add new recruits.
- ◆ Sometimes it did take a lot of time to get through the posts. Also, when there were a lot of threads, because of the type of person I am, I felt I had to read them all to see if they were updated and it took a lot of time.
- ◆ software was clumsy & too linear.
- ◆ Really lousy in practice. Level of discourse was low; set-up -- four weeks and out -- was absurdly artificial; lots of lowest-common-denominator discussion, or parroting of last night's Larry King, or whatever.
- ◆ Not enough time to read and respond as much as I'd like.
- ◆ No moderator to deal with obnoxiousness, disrespectful "post hogs" who seemed hell bent that others agree with them or else. I think it would be good to have a group facilitator with some agreed upon guidelines for discussion. And someone could be warned that if they don't follow the guidelines they will have to leave the group.
- ◆ No limits on length or number of posts!
- ◆ No email notification of new messages posted to the group.
- ◆ Narrow topic.
- ◆ Low turnout: out of fifty, there were probably only 10-15 active participants.
- ◆ Lackluster aesthetics, slow navigation, Lewinskigate topic wore thin QUICKLY!
- ◆ It went on and on and on about the love life, personal life, of a president, when there are so many more important things to deal with.

What did you like least about Reality Check?

- ◆ It was a bit cumbersome to use until you got used to it. I wish people in my group had been a little more active, but for the most part we seem to have separated into the "hang 'em" and the "love 'em" groups very quickly and it became difficult to get much of a response across groups.
- ◆ It should have been set up with cookies so that you wouldn't have to wade through messages you'd already seen.
- ◆ It ended. Alas and alack.
- ◆ Interface a little clunky.
- ◆ In our group, we could have used a wider difference of opinion.
- ◆ I was surprised at the relatively small interest in the fact that I am a 25 year veteran on National politics and a Clinton appointee, with other than a "party line" outlook.
- ◆ I was amazed at how some of the people would respond to a message with a closed mind and without really considering the message that was posted.
- ◆ I thought the size of the discussion group was a bit too large. I would have preferred to have only five or six members in the group (preferably the most vocal members). This would have made it easier to get to know each member more personally.
- ◆ I think the group was too large. Too confusing to keep up with all of the threads.
- ◆ I think that the main topic should change with the news. There were other things going on during the time I was involved with the group that I thought warranted more attention than a horny POTUS.
- ◆ It was too short lived
- ◆ I ended up wanting to meet some of the people that were in the group; it would have been great going to the corner for a cup of coffee and continuing the conversation there!
- ◆ I disliked the self-congratulatory vibes about how smart and accepting we are were. I disliked feeling finally that all the talk is just that and no action. I never did seem to be "in" the group. While I did post several times a week, I never found satisfactory response to what I wrote. Maybe I am just off the wall or dull.
- ◆ Hearing new voices speak stale ideologies, esp. with poor grammar & spelling.
- ◆ elitist and stuck up
- ◆ Elitism. The sheer size.
- ◆ Cumbersome to find where previous session ended and take up where I left off. Cumbersome to find answers to my comments or to continue a thread
- ◆ being ignored
- ◆ As with any discussion forum, people seemed to use it to further religious views, and felt free to be insulting.
- ◆ As a conservative, I was totally outnumbered! Most of the people who participated regularly in my group were liberal, and I sometimes felt like I was the only one out there with my view point. But even if it turned out that way again, I wouldn't shy away from the group.
- ◆ a lot of people don't know how to build a community
- ◆ a few personal attacks
- ◆ A few headcases spoiled it a bit.

Did your participation in Reality Check change your view of the Internet or the World Wide Web? If so, how?

- ◆ A bit. I saw the potential, but did not realize it in this instance.
- ◆ Confirmed my view that there's way too much chaff to separate from the wheat.
- ◆ Exacerbated my positive feelings of how important the internet is to all of us. A superb avenue for world wide communication. We had several people on our List who were not Americans living in America, and a couple of foreigners who were living here. Their points-of-view were worth a great deal to me. I think we Americans need to listen.

Did your participation in Reality Check change your view of the Internet or the World Wide Web? If so, how?

- ◆ participation at it's power to be a vehicle for information and idea exchange.
- ◆ Gave me a bit more faith that closed groups could have generally civil discussions
- ◆ I am a net-o-holic, but this was the first time that I saw a site that actually contained postings at level above trash talk.
- ◆ I don't know if it changed my view of the net, but it was a unique experience. I haven't participated in anything like it since.
- ◆ I had never used the internet before. Now, I use it daily.
- ◆ I like the idea of "blue ribbon" discussion groups, groups where the participants are in some way qualified more in terms of being dedicated to a serious, thoughtful discussion than in terms of expertise or knowledge. Without serious, thoughtful participants discussions are a waste of time.
- ◆ I liked trying out a different way of interacting with people.
- ◆ I participate in several on-line discussion groups and found that RC was the only one where those of opposing viewpoints were allowed to say their piece without condemnation (usually). There also seemed to be a higher level of education, for lack of a better word, among those who posted frequently.
- ◆ I saw that there was intelligent life out there, and the hope of real grassroots chemistry.
- ◆ I was hoping for a more positive experience. I am not sure I will participate in an online discussion in the future.
- ◆ I was pleased to find an organized discussion group, there seemed to be so much chaos in any of the other forums that I have looked into.
- ◆ I'd been feeling negative about all the flaming. This made me feel more hopeful.
- ◆ In a way it made me appreciate it more..... the variety of experience was rewarding...
- ◆ In a way. I recently saw a discussion going on in MSN, where some Islam guy waded in and basically accused every non-islam of being drunken, immoral fools, who came home drunk, got on their computers and killed stuff. Basically slagging off everyone not Islamic. This seemed to have evoked a whole bunch of idiots writing in to slag off Islam, which just provoked a worse diatribe from the Islam bloke. They all then seemed to have abandoned the discussion, with no-one having got anything except bad feeling for everyone else through it all.
- ◆ It certainly gave me a more optimistic view of the potential for Internet discussion groups.
- ◆ It helped me to realize a little better how the Web can be an effective medium of communication between people.
- ◆ It inspired me to go find places that were more receptive and I did.
- ◆ It made real some of my hopes for the Internet.
- ◆ It renewed my hope that there was innovation in more than e-commerce out there.
- ◆ It showed me of the great possibilities
- ◆ It showed me that an online discussion group could become a community of sorts. I really cared about some of the members of the group.
- ◆ It was the ONLY time on-line that I felt that I participated in a meaningful discussion.
- ◆ My previous foray into discussion groups was in chat rooms. The dialogues taking place there tend to favor the extremely quick, bitter, or vitriolic poster. I found the medium of RC allowed for more time to think through posts and allowed each member to fully develop thoughts and arguments.
- ◆ My view of the Internet was drastically changed as I felt I was a "participant" rather than a "user". I was contributing in my own small way.
- ◆ No change, but a definite reinforcement of the notion that information and reasoned argument, freely exchanged, can lead to major improvements in our world view.
- ◆ No, actually it reassured me about the possibilities of having an open forum on a more "global" scale.
- ◆ Positively as to its value. Some other message boards have had the contrary effect.

Did your participation in Reality Check change your view of the Internet or the World Wide Web? If so, how?

- ◆ Possibly. It really is a great idea, I hope future versions will be better implemented. (as a webmaster I know just how huge a I that is!)
- ◆ Reality check was closer to what the internet discussion groups were meant to be than most. No one making an “age/sex check” for example. [“middle/no thank you”] Also no one turning it into a sales pitch for joining Amway or some such.
- ◆ Somewhat. I have tried other discussion groups and for the most part they seem like places to say anything as long as it’s outrageous. And that people didn’t really “listen” to what people were saying. But RC seemed to keep to task for the most part. And people seemed to listen.
- ◆ When RC was around, I realized how far the internet had come. Now I realize how far it has to go.
- ◆ Yeah. This is what I thought the WWW was supposed to be about.
- ◆ Yes, it affirmed my belief that the WWW is a valuable tool for the 21st century. It is capable of allowing full participation by the electorate.
- ◆ Yes, it did. Until Reality Check, the forums I had participated in were rife with flammers and those who wouldn’t take the time to ask questions in order to understand what was being said or why it was being said. It was frustrating and fruitless. Not so with Reality Check.
- ◆ Yes. Dialogue is possible! (And not just to meet some crazed pedophile on a chat group!!!)
- ◆ Yes. It made me appreciate the community building potential of the net.
- ◆ Yes. It proved that people of divergent views can all learn from one another, without major battles.
- ◆ Yes. It was the first time I’d used a discussion forum where the majority of people in it seemed genuinely intelligent – and capable of expressing their views in way which was respectful to people of opposing opinions.

In what ways do you think your participation in Reality Check improved your communication skills, either online or in face-to-face situations?

- ◆ Actually, I think my participation in the group improved my face-to-face and written communications tremendously, and for that I thank Reality Check. In many instances, I communicate like I think - in incomplete sentences. Because I was constantly writing my thoughts and feelings down in a forum that many people would read, I was forced to actually work through the mental inconsistencies and, in some instances, rethink how I felt about things. All in all, a very good experience in this respect!
- ◆ careful phrasing of thoughts
- ◆ helped focus my thoughts on a topic.
- ◆ Helped me capsulize and express ideas.
- ◆ I am too old (74) to think that anything or anyone can improve my communication skills.
- ◆ I became more familiar with online dialog and its limitations.
- ◆ I became more sensitive to word choice and phrasing
- ◆ I choose my words more carefully because they are my sole means of communicating.
- ◆ I did learn to to be more cautious when discussing "hot" topics. I learned how to smooth things over much better than I knew before.
- ◆ I don't feel like I became a better communicator, but I did learn to communicate in a different way.
- ◆ I felt quite privileged to be engaging in debate with some of the highly educated people who participated in my group. I was very pleased that my opinions and ideas were respected, and I was delighted when my ideas prompted serious discussion by others.
- ◆ I have become much more vocal about my opinions/

In what ways do you think your participation in Reality Check improved your communication skills, either online or in face-to-face situations?

- ◆ I learned about online communication. I learned I do not like it.
- ◆ I learned to calm down in my responses to those I disagreed with.
- ◆ I learned to have a more tolerant viewpoint.
- ◆ I learned to not take things too personally. I also learned about how I may disagree with some of other people's viewpoints, but that we all can find something to agree upon.
- ◆ I learned to tone down my online communication.
- ◆ I suppose it helped to improve my writing skills and hone my opinions.
- ◆ I think I'm a better listener now.
- ◆ I think it made me more mindful of the need to be as clear as possible in one's language in order to be persuasive with people who hold different views.
- ◆ I think RC has taught me, or rather re-enforced for me, that there is no wrong and right, no black and white. There are shades of grey, and we are all right, in our own way. You just need to understand where the other guys right comes into contact/conflict with yours.
- ◆ In mostly negative ways: it is easy
- ◆ Increased my appreciation for proofing prior to posting!
- ◆ It allowed me to see other points of view on a subject- that perhaps I at first didn't agree with or was passionate about. There are other sides to things. Face to face I never talked to anyone who voted for Bill Clinton!
- ◆ It allowed me to test my own beliefs and catch any hypocrisy lurking around. The word limit also encouraged me to be more brief than I might otherwise have been.
- ◆ it allowed me to view the opinion of others - without it shocking me into a defensive response
- ◆ It caused me to think things through before posting my two-cents-worth.
- ◆ It did help me to take the time to consider how best to present my opinion or argue my case - something other discussion groups also helped with.
- ◆ It educated me on better ways to get
- ◆ It focused my attention on the need to get my point across as briefly and as clearly as possible.
- ◆ It gave me a real-time-access to American views which I would not meet in normal contact (even in the US).
- ◆ It helped me in my written communication skills by trying to clarify the points that I am trying to make.
- ◆ It helped me think out my positions and state them better.
- ◆ it helped to refine and focus expression..
- ◆ It helped work on organization of thoughts, introduction to conclusion, to establish a complete argument.
- ◆ It is always beneficial to engage others in a dialog. Formulating comments and answers to others arguments stimulated my thought processes.
- ◆ it made me more aware of the news, giving me more to talk about
- ◆ It made me think a little more before writing.....making sure that I had the proper quotes and references.
- ◆ It made me think precisely, succinctly and thoroughly.
- ◆ It promoted tolerance of others and their right to their opinion.
- ◆ It reminded me of college. It helped me to hone my communication skills. I knew that what I wrote would be read and dissected by many people from all walks of life and various levels of intelligence; therefore, I wanted to make sure that I said what I meant, and meant what I said.
- ◆ It required accuracy in any statements made, just in case proof was asked for.
- ◆ It taught me somewhat how to communicate more forceful to get my point across.
- ◆ It taught me to be concise and straight forward because few would respond to long messages

In what ways do you think your participation in Reality Check improved your communication skills, either online or in face-to-face situations?

- ◆ It was clear that people examine everything you have to say and if you go too far left field they will let you know and suggest you rethink your argument.
- ◆ I've always been one to research things, but this forum had me scrambling to search deeper and farther afield...a very good thing! It made me think about things I might never have thought about if I hadn't had contact with people who saw things from so many different angles.
- ◆ I've learned to be more patient with those in need of particular forms of psychic surgery: the procedure I have in mind would be called rectalencephalotomy.
- ◆ Made me think more when I wrote a response.
- ◆ Much greater respect for the foundation of those views that were different from my own.
- ◆ My online communication skills were much improved by Reality Check. Face to face, I converse easily. I had to learn to communicate without facial expression, both my own and viewing others'. Some words, said with a smile, become more harsh in writing alone. They had to be softened in another way.
- ◆ Not all that much, except that after all that typing, I got better at that!
- ◆ People are more likely to tell you in writing they don't understand what you say so you can correct and be more clear. In person they nod and "Uh huh".
- ◆ Quite a bit, I had to put a lot of thought into my posts, not to mention a lot of thought into all of the posts that I read.
- ◆ RC made me think about the perspectives of others in a more accepting and patient frame of mind.
- ◆ Reality Check helped me to again realize that other people exist with a different point of view.
- ◆ The group motivated me to think more about my own beliefs and comments. If discussing politics face-to-face with a friend, I usually don't spend time really thinking about the situation and what I am saying...in Reality Check, we had to think about what we were saying so that it could make sense to the others who read it.
- ◆ The Net in general over the past four years I have been online has improved my communication skills. For one thing it has brought me into proximity with many different kinds of people, so I have learned that I cannot just blast away, probably gained some needed subtlety. Because I want to get my point across the Net has taught me to think more clearly, succinctly and to the point. Totally ruined my spelling because I am a fast typist; I also feel the Net will change language and spelling over time.
- ◆ When I strongly disagreed with but respected someone, I/we learned it was better to give a little line from time to time than to just keep reeling. The conversations were best when people didn't feel the need to reel.
- ◆ With one's credibility at stake, I felt the need to really know what I was talking about because those that didn't were quickly exposed.
- ◆ Writing practice always helps. Also, knowing your readers as a specific group of individuals who you (more-or-less) know, and who represent a broad spectrum of viewpoints, forces one to carefully consider possible counterargument. You also get a very good idea of the kinds of preconceived notions that may be preventing others from accepting your point of view.

In what ways did your participation in Reality Check change the way you think about conversations with other people, either online or face-to-face?

- ◆ Actually, I think I was able to converse better with people online than off, but this may in part be due to the fact that the people I see face to face locally are not all that interested in or knowledgeable about the same issues discussed in the group.
- ◆ Face to face doesn't require you to listen to a person, you can always tune out. When you open a posting, you have to at least glance through it to see if there's anything of interest there and whether it's elicited a response from you. An interesting twist on communicating.
- ◆ I am more respectful of opposing thoughts and opinions.
- ◆ I became a better listener.
- ◆ I feel that I've been able to appreciate other's opinions better after participating in Reality Check.
- ◆ I found it easier to express my self about political issues online than face-to-face, but that may be because I didn't already know the members of the group.
- ◆ I found that most people (at least the ones in RC) are open to understanding even when they disagree. There are always bad apples but for the most part everyone surprised me with their gentility and consideration.
- ◆ I got into a heavy discussion with a gun nut and actually got to appreciate his point of view, and he mine, though he's still a nut...
- ◆ I liked RC as a forum because not talking in real time enables a more thoughtful and meaningful exchange.
- ◆ I realized that some people are just plain nutcases and no amount of reasonable conversation can overcome that.
- ◆ Improved my listening skills
- ◆ It didn't really - but it did show me that others want to try to exchange and understand different points of view, even if they don't change their minds.
- ◆ It enhanced my appreciation of a good education, and the range and quality of information we can obtain via the Internet and Web.
- ◆ It helped me to listen to and appreciate other viewpoints more.
- ◆ It highlighted the point that other people's opinions are often not predictable on the basis of simply knowing who they are and what they do for a living. It also suggested there are relatively more thoughtful people around than what might be expected from an examination of our mass media and mass culture. This is encouraging. Television hasn't (yet) entirely destroyed the capacity for thinking.
- ◆ It made me feel its better to be a little restrained.
- ◆ It made me think that perhaps folks in general don't really express their opinions publicly because of fear of exposure or concern that they really don't have a right to an opinion...low self esteem.
- ◆ It reminds one to be thoughtful of others and also demonstrated how many are not. It also showed many to be bigots and absolutely set on certain views, often without basis except emotionalism.
- ◆ It's good to take the time to listen to what other people are thinking. And that a lot of the time it's not so far off from what I'm thinking.
- ◆ I've thought a lot about the medium as far as potentially contentious discussions go, and think the internet is particularly good because it gives the participant a chance to reflect on his or her true feelings as s(he) is writing. I think the discussion is therefore more reasoned and less hostile because there's no way to "shout out" an opinion. People think more and react less.
- ◆ Learned to share a little better in terms of giving others some space and time.
- ◆ Listen, it wasn't a religious experience . . .
- ◆ Made me a bit more thoughtful - which is no bad thing.
- ◆ Made me more open and less afraid to express my own opinion. Didn't feel like I had to agree or disagree with anyone else so was more honest.
- ◆ more likely to be more tolerant of others view's

In what ways did your participation in Reality Check change the way you think about conversations with other people, either online or face-to-face?

- ◆ Most people have an inflated opinion of their intellect (myself included) But there is really nothing new being said out there
- ◆ Perhaps I am more careful in my critical thinking.
- ◆ Perhaps made me a little less argumentative, although I'm sure some would differ with that assessment.
- ◆ Re-enforced experience that it is very rare to find someone who is willing to listen to someone else's view.
- ◆ That some people are single minded and there is no way any kind of argument will get through to them.
- ◆ The forum was open to a diversity of viewpoints and feedback on positions I took made me revisit assumptions I held.
- ◆ The standards here were already higher than what I was used to for discussion groups, so I didn't feel I had to spend so much time "teaching history" with each posting or reminding people of everything that had already been said...
- ◆ This was great! I found it interesting that people unlike/like myself felt the same way about the same issues. And when we disagreed, it was done so in an adult manner.
- ◆ Through my participation in Reality Check I learned to assign personalities to people without having to see them. This was hard at first without knowing if they were young or old, short or tall, fat or thin, smiling or stone faced. Eventually, these things simply didn't matter. I could tell what they were like without the physical trappings. I still prefer face to face conversations though.
- ◆ Working on overcoming stereotypes is something I needed to do. Too often the people who would be writing are people that I would discount if I were to meet them face to face. Realizing that they have something to contribute to the discussion is important.
- ◆ yes, there are many fools in the world

Is there anything you'd like to add about your experience with Reality Check?

- ◆ A fine effort, I want to see more, and better. I sound more critical than I mean to be. I do that.
- ◆ A terrible disappointment. A bright idea that ended up, and quickly, mealy-mouthed and ineffective.
- ◆ As I understood it, it was supposed to be an alternative to the frenzy of attention being given to the Clinton Impeachment Scandal. It often seemed, however, to be echoing the frenzy.
- ◆ Bring it back! There have been *plenty* of issues at least as deserving of a nation-wide discussion as the impeachment since that fiasco. There ought to be a national forum for just this purpose.
- ◆ bring it back, although the time seemed long enough for the particular issue.
- ◆ Despite the "required" subject matter it was a very stimulating experience.
- ◆ enjoyable, educational and odd to have it close down after building a group
- ◆ Good idea. Why not keep it up?
- ◆ I am waiting for it to start again.
- ◆ I antagonized people I'd no intention of antagonizing. Smiting an enemy can cost you a friend.
- ◆ I applaud your attempt. Disappointed that a more novel approach to overcome common difficulties was not included.
- ◆ I believe a topic could be beat to death if allowed to be debated for too long, believe there should be a separate area to continue a discussion which others might be interested in while continuing to provide other interesting topics for discussion to the main body of the group.

Is there anything you'd like to add about your experience with Reality Check?

- ◆ I didn't like it from the beginning. There was one person who hogged the forum too much. She was very bright and witty, but very egotistical and had little or no compassion. We had a slight confrontation when I brought this to her attention.(non-compassion)
- ◆ I enjoyed it very much and am looking forward to joining another group soon.
- ◆ I enjoyed it.
- ◆ I enjoyed it. I hope to see it continue so that I can participate again.
- ◆ I learned that those that weren't working were long winded and often pro-government. I was truly amazed at the people that had computers and internet access but didn't work.
- ◆ I like the limited group interaction. It allowed the group to focus discussions with a manageable number of people. Additionally, it was easy to follow the threads of each discussions.
- ◆ I loved it and would join again in a second. I would like to see something changed to make it faster to get in and out of the different threads. Because of the amount of material, it sometimes took a while to load.
- ◆ I loved it, and I look forward to participating in Reality Check again.
- ◆ I think it is a great concept, implemented well and with a tremendous potential. I hope to be involved with it again in the future.
- ◆ I think most if not all the folks in my group joined after hearing the NPR piece....we were surprisingly like-minded.
- ◆ I think that the next version of Reality Check should be oriented more toward problem solving, SOLUTIONS, and less about problem analysis and venting opinions.
- ◆ I want it back.
- ◆ I was disappointed that it has not been continued/extended. I look forward to a possible resurrection.
- ◆ I was fortunate to be assigned to one of the most active groups and the one of the longest duration. Some of us maintained the dialogue past the point that RC existed, but that is not as effective as only a few actually post and we bore each other.
- ◆ I wish it would come back and stay.
- ◆ I would like a choice about the topics I spend time communicating about.
- ◆ I would very much like to take part in something similar in the future. I would recommend a bit more supervision, particularly in the area of people with exceptional amounts of free time dominating threads of discussion.
- ◆ I'd do it again, it really keeps you up to speed with the news today...even got people from other countries telling what they think of American situations
- ◆ I'm glad you're trying to keep it going. It has potential for taking thinking about government and politics beyond the dumbed down level of current media
- ◆ It may sound funny, but I found it a safe place to "argue". Not in a negative way, but in a constructive way. I also felt like I made friends. It would be great to run into familiar names in my next group. I miss the interaction.
- ◆ It was valuable, and provided me with five, on-line friends with whom I still exchange ideas on a daily basis. In that regard alone, Reality Check was very valuable.
- ◆ It was very rewarding, kind of like political therapy. I'd do it again, but probably only 1-3 times a year for no more than 5 weeks at a crack with time off to process, gather more knowledge and reintroduce myself to my family after so many hours online. The time element is critical, I think, in the quality of the experience.
- ◆ It would have been more valuable if I hadn't been so involved in peripheral nonsense that distracted me. Clinton is a fool, and I wasted far too much time caring about things that were clearly not integral to his psyche. I was a fool to care about him and his vapid intellect.

Is there anything you'd like to add about your experience with Reality Check?

- ◆ Keep it up and find some way to better qualify the participants in the discussion groups. By "qualifying" I mean find people who are not necessarily experts on the topic but who are committed to participating actively and thoughtfully. Try to exclude the ideologues who simply want a forum in which to preach their party line while ignoring any arguments or evidence to the contrary. You might check Milton Rokeach's book, "The Open and Closed Mind," and look for ways to screen out people with closed minds. They reduce a discussion to cant and bore everyone else.
- ◆ moderating the process such that a running tally or summary of points and conclusions might make the exchange more meaningful.
- ◆ Only that I'd like to do it again, perhaps on the upcoming 2000 elections.
- ◆ Please bring it back! The idea of having a limited number of people for an extended period of time freely exchanging ideas that might once have been rejected out of hand was a mind-opening experience. It forced me to think and evaluate my preconceptions; the pain of that was far outweighed by the pleasure!
- ◆ Please keep it going, and encourage people to generate their own topics next time rather than prompting them with a single topic such as "impeachment"
- ◆ Restart it! Most interesting thing on the web for ages.
- ◆ Several of the members of my group in Reality Check moved me with their honesty. They sometimes revealed personal experiences bearing upon the topic being discussed. Often this took exceptional courage on their part. These revelations were always met with warmth and support by the other members. I found we all had much more in common than in diversity.
- ◆ still think it's promising ...
- ◆ The best part was that the people brought into the group seemed quite intelligent (as opposed to educated) and interested in the dialogue. This, in and of itself, is the most important factor for the success of the group (in my opinion).
- ◆ Try to elevate the dialog and find a fundamental subject which has more substance and is not so transitory.
- ◆ Unfortunately, political debate in the USA has reached a point where leaders(?) made statements of "party lines" or similar repetitive positions, then people repeat them over and over.
- ◆ Wasn't as productive of "revealing" discussion as I had hoped for.