Interpreting Scientific Articles

Reporting of science in the media often relies on a non-scientist interpreting the results of a scientific paper in order to explain them in a way which is understandable and engaging to a general audience. The success of this interpretation can vary greatly, and results of the original paper can be misrepresented or exaggerated. Your job will be to explore this process from two points of view: the author of a scientific news article and the reader of such an article.

You will find three recent scientific articles listed under this assignment on the course website. They are selected from journals written at a level appropriate for a well-informed but non-expert general audience. Choose one of them and do the following:

1) Write an example of a bad news article reporting on the findings in the paper. Please limit this to 400 words.
2) Write an example of a good news article reporting on the findings in the paper, again using no more than 400 words.
3) Compare and contrast the two versions of your news article, explaining how each fails/succeeds at interpreting and communicating the science in the paper.

In your comparison, focus on the following criteria, which should also serve as the guidelines for creating your “good” and “bad” articles.

- Does the article accurately report the methods and findings of the paper?
- Are the scientific details explained at an understandable level without being needlessly technical or overly simplified?
- Is the significance or impact of the paper accurately represented? Is there any exaggeration?
- Does the article get the reader excited about science?