

Olympics on TV: Where's the buzz?

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By Ann Oldenburg, USA TODAY



The world's grandest sports gathering, an event that historically crushes the competition in television ratings has been losing millions of viewers each night since the Games began a week ago to hot new episodes of entertainment shows. The trend suggests that the counter-programming is stronger than ever, that alternative sources of Olympics news are more accessible online — and perhaps even that the Games have lost some *resonance* with American viewers.

Prime-time viewership for the first six nights of the Winter Games is down 36% from Salt Lake City in 2002, 17% from Nagano in 1998 and 44% from Lillehammer in 1994. Not only are other networks, sensing weakness, putting up more competition, but the six- to nine-hour time difference between Italy and the USA means Americans can find out the results well before NBC goes on the air. Those thrill-of-victory, agony-of-defeat moments in prime time seem a little stale when the winners have been decided and results posted online, viewers say.

Wednesday in the head-to-head battle, Fox's *American Idol* again trounced NBC's Olympics. From 8:30 to 9 p.m. (the Olympics were unrated by Nielsen from 8 to 8:30), *Idol* averaged 31.1 million viewers to the Games' 15.4 million. ABC's hit drama *Lost* was almost even with the Olympics at 9 p.m. Overall, Fox took the evening, NBC's second loss in a row. Not all the numbers are bad. Traffic at NBC's Olympics website, the top Olympics site, doubled over the weekend, and CNBC's and MSNBC's coverage of the Games, often of minor events, is pulling in far more viewers than the cable networks' usual fare. NBC, which has invested more than \$700 million in rights fees and production costs to televise the events from Torino, still expects to turn a profit of at least \$50 million.

In 2002, during the last winter Olympics, NBC had top series and simply pre-empted what would have been its most difficult competition for viewers. Now the biggest competition to NBC's programming has come from Fox's *Idol*, whose appeal is stronger than ever in its fifth season. American Idol beats the Olympics on TV, NBC's website is clobbering idolonfox.com, according to Nielsen/NetRatings. (It makes sense, because the search is for results in the Olympics before prime time, while *Idol* results are unknown until the show airs.) For the week ending Sunday, idolon fox.com attracted 509,000 unique visitors, while NBCOlympics.com attracted 2.3 million visitors. Combined, all Olympics-related sites attracted nearly 3 million individuals for the week ending Sunday.

1. What are the odds and probability of a random Wednesday night viewer electing to watch American Idol over the Olympics?
2. What are the odds and probability of a random internet surfer electing to visit Idolonfox.com over the NBCOlympics.com?
3. How do television networks explain the lack of interest in the Olympics; an event which traditionally conquered the ratings for decades. Explain.
4. In volume four, edition six, question two we learned that NBC's profit for the games in Salt Lake and Athens was \$75 million each. Assuming NBC made \$51 million in profits for Torino, what would be the percent of change? Do these results represent an increase or decrease? Explain.
5. Assume for a moment that all three million individuals reviewing Olympics-related sites also viewed the Olympics Wednesday night from 8:30 – 9:00 p.m. What percent, decimal, and fraction of individuals who visited a related web site also watched the Olympics Wednesday evening?
6. In the passage above, *in paragraph form*, explain at least seven ways using the "**Reading Across The Curriculum**" poster simplifies understanding of the material. Be specific.
7. *In paragraph form*, list at least five ways using guidelines from the **Writing Guidelines** will make you a stronger and more convincing writer; specifically, on The Daughtry Times.
8. Using contextual clues only, explain the meaning of the italicized word *resonance*.
9. In paragraph form, explain five legitimate and educational purposes behind The Daughtry Times.