OVERVIEW
On Thursday, June 23, 2016, British voters headed to polling stations to decide whether their country should exit the European Union. As poll results trickled in, the number favoring leaving the EU pulled ahead. The next morning, all eyes were on England as the vote results were officially announced and it was clear that the United Kingdom would be the first country to leave the EU. The ensuing plummet of the British currency, the pound, and resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron solidified Brexit as an event that would go down in British and world history.
YOUR TASK
Newspapers across the globe covered this event on their print front pages. The amount of available information varied by time zone. Imagine that you are in a newsroom and are charged with deciding whether and how to cover the unfolding Brexit vote in your print edition. Read the background information and then answer the questions that follow with your group.

BACKGROUND:

The European Union
The EU grew out of a desire for peace and economic strength through collaboration in a war-torn European continent. The result was a deal signed in 1950 by six nations to pool their coal and steel resources, according to BBC News. At the time of the British vote, the EU had 28 member nations. Featuring a high degree of integration, the EU has grown to become one of the three largest economies in the world. Nineteen of the member nations use the euro as their currency. Typically cited benefits of the EU include standardization of product and labor rules, removal of certain barriers to efficient production, and free movement of labor. Typically cited drawbacks include protectionist and nationalist pressures as well as difficulties arising out of standardization.

The Referendum
On Thursday, June 23, 2016, the UK held a referendum open to all British citizens of voting age to decide whether to remain in the EU. The two political camps were referred to as “Leave” and “Remain.” Before the referendum, polling was leaning toward Remain, with major pollsters giving them an 8 percentage point edge. Then, as results on June 23 began trickling in, the Leave camp started to gain momentum while Remain supporters grew increasingly nervous.

The results came in around 5 a.m. London time on the day after the vote. Leave won the vote with 52 percent; Remain garnered 48 percent. The chart at right, made by the British Broadcasting Corporation, shows how the four countries of the UK voted.

The Fallout

Immediately after the announcement, the British currency — the pound — took a hit, dropping in value nearly 11 percent, the lowest level against the U.S. dollar since 1985. In addition, British Prime Minister David Cameron decided to step down after failing to secure Britain’s place in the EU.
How Would You Cover the Brexit Vote?

First decide which newspaper you work for. You can either invent a paper or choose one that already exists. Then work with your group to answer these questions.

1. Name of your paper:

2. Where is your newspaper located?

3. What is the time difference between your location and London?

4. Describe your readership:

5. What factors would affect your decision on how to cover the Brexit vote? Consider your readership.

6. How would you cover the story? What would be the focus of your story: the vote returns (whether partial or final), the plummet of the pound, the resignation of David Cameron, or some other aspect of the story? Explain.

7. Where would the story appear? On the front page? Above or below the fold? On an inside page?

8. How would you handle the vote count if your deadline came before the final results?
9. How could the time difference between your newspaper’s location and the UK help or hurt your coverage?

10. How would you cover the Brexit vote on your website? Compare and contrast your coverage in print versus digital.
Follow-up Questions

With your class or group, view how newspapers around the world covered the vote on their front pages on June 24, 2016. When done, think about the plan your group put together and how it compares with that of professional journalists. Then, answer these questions:

Which newspaper’s coverage of Brexit is your favorite? Why?

Which front page do you find the most engaging overall to the reader, taking into account content and appearance? Why?

How you think time zones affected the reporting by your favorite paper?

Would you change your coverage after seeing how the pros handled it? If yes, how? If not, why not?

What does the print coverage of Brexit suggest about the role of digital coverage in today’s world?