

Evaluating Sources: How Credible Are They?

ACTIVITY 2.6

Learning Targets

- Identify and gather relevant information from a variety of research sources.
- Differentiate between primary and secondary sources.
- Examine research sources for reliability and credibility.

Preview

In this activity, you will evaluate research sources for reliability, accuracy, credibility, timeliness, and purpose/audience.

Research Sources

After choosing a topic and writing research questions, the next step is to find sources of information. Sources might be books, magazines, documentary films, or online information. Not all sources are equal, however. Some are better than others. Learning how to tell the difference is a skill you need for both your academic success and your life.

Evaluating Sources

- You can evaluate both print and online resources using five separate criteria, including authority, accuracy, **credibility**, timeliness, and purpose/audience. Use a dictionary or work with your classmates and teacher to define each term in the graphic organizer that follows. Then add questions that you can ask yourself when evaluating sources based on this criterion.

Source Criteria	Definition	Questions to Consider
1. Authority		Who is the author? What organization is behind this information? What are the qualifications of the author or organization to write about this topic?
2. Accuracy		Determine if the content of the source is fact, opinion, or propaganda. If you think the source is offering facts, are the sources clearly indicated?
3. Credibility		Is the information trustworthy? Does it show any biases for or against the topic?
4. Timeliness		How old is the source? Some sources become dated when new research is available, but other sources of information can remain quite sound.
5. Purpose/Audience		What is the purpose of the information? To whom is it directed?

Learning Strategies

Predicting
Note-taking
Graphic Organizer
Questioning the Text
RAFT

ACADEMIC

Credibility comes from the word *credible*, which means “believable or trustworthy.” A source that is credible should be free from bias, and present the facts fairly.

VOCABULARY

ACTIVITY 2.6

PLAN

Materials: a major brand’s policy on marketing to children, research sources/Internet, two preselected websites for evaluation, highlighters
Suggested Pacing: 3 50-minute class periods

TEACH

- Now that students have done some preliminary research, they need to understand how to evaluate the sources they are consulting.
- Vocabulary Development:** Review the meaning of the term *credibility* with students. Have them work in pairs to define the term in their own words and think of both examples and non-examples of people or things that have credibility.
- First, read the introductory paragraph. Then, guide students to complete the graphic organizer by predicting or using a print or digital resource to determine the meaning of each source evaluation criterion. Then have students take notes to define each criterion presented.



TEACHER TO TEACHER

Many major brands that sell goods aimed at young people have policies on marketing to children. They can be found online easily by searching for the key terms “marketing to children policy.” Some brands that have policies about marketing to children include Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Nestlé, and Mars.

College and Career Readiness Standards

Focus Standards:

RI.7.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

RI.7.8 Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

W.7.2e Establish and maintain a formal style.

W.7.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

ACTIVITY 2.6 continued

11 Share with students a company’s policy about marketing to children from the Internet. Allow students to read the statement and ask them to discuss the purpose of the text with a partner.

LEVELED DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

In this activity, students may need support analyzing the text.

Developing Guide students in analyzing the author’s claim and evidence by using the **Idea and Argument Evaluator** graphic organizer.

Expanding Have students work in pairs to complete the **Idea and Argument Evaluator** graphic organizer.

Bridging Have students complete the **Idea and Argument Evaluator** graphic organizer independently. Then have student pairs use the **discourse starters** in the resource section to hold a discussion on their findings.

Support Provide students with one example of evidence from the text. Then have student pairs work together to complete the remaining sections of the **Idea and Argument Evaluator** graphic organizer.

12 Ask students to identify the differences between a primary source and a secondary source to give examples of each. To transition to the topic of evaluating online sources, help students see that online sources can be either primary or secondary. Ask students to name some examples of primary and secondary sources found on the Internet (primary: interviews with newsmakers, government archives that have been digitized, etc.; secondary: news articles, websites devoted to analyzing historical events, etc.).

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VOCABULARY

ACADEMIC

A **primary source** is an original account or record created at the time of an event by someone who witnessed or was involved in it. Autobiographies, letters, and government records are types of primary sources.

Secondary sources analyze, interpret, or critique primary sources. Textbooks, books about historical events, and works of criticism, such as movie and book reviews, are secondary sources.

Working from the Text

2. What effect does the advertising most likely have on young readers? How do you know?

The advertising most likely will make children ask for the product from their parents. The letter says that the ads are presented like the rest of the content, making it even harder for them to understand that the ads are trying to persuade them, not inform them like the rest of the content.

3. What evidence does the text provide to support the statement that “These advertisements were deceptive to children and violated the guidelines of the Children’s Advertising Review Unit...”?

The text of the guidelines is quoted directly as “Advertising should not be presented in a manner that blurs the distinction between advertising and program/editorial content in ways that would be misleading to children.” The text also provides a description of the ads that violated the guidelines: “The ads were brightly colorful cartoon drawings, with interwoven questions in bubbles meant to engage children—a visual style quite similar to much of the editorial content of the supplement. Each ad was disguised as a puzzle for kids...”

4. According to the text, what action does the text attempt to persuade the New York Times Company to take for future editions of their kids’ magazine? What next step is provided in the letter?

The argument hopes to convince the New York Times Company to publish their kids’ magazine without any advertising. The next step provided in the letter is a meeting between parties to discuss the concerns outlined in the letter in more depth.

5. Your teacher will provide you with an outside source to read. Read the text closely. Then use the graphic organizer that follows to evaluate “Re: Advertising in the New York Times For Kids” and the text provided to you by your teacher based on the five criteria to determine reliability.

Re: Advertising in the New York Times For Kids	Outside Source
Authority:	Authority:
Accuracy:	Accuracy:
Credibility:	Credibility:
Timeliness:	Timeliness:
Purpose/Audience:	Purpose/Audience:

Primary and Secondary Sources

When choosing credible and reliable sources, you will find **primary** and **secondary sources**. Primary sources are original documents; they are often used in historical

research. For example, if you are researching the era of the Civil War, you might use the primary resource of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. You might find that speech in a secondary source written about the Civil War or on the Internet.

6. Revisit the texts you have read so far in the unit, including the advertisements you have analyzed. Are they primary or secondary sources? How do you know?

The two articles in 2.2 and 2.3 are secondary sources because both report on data and information about advertisements and how people interact with ads and mobile devices. The report mentioned in the Methodology section of “Mobile Kids” would be a primary source. The advertisements are a primary source.

Evaluating Online Resources

Anyone can publish writing on the Internet. This openness is both one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses of the Internet. Being aware of the differences in quality among websites is an important step toward becoming an effective researcher.

A good place to start evaluating a website’s credibility and reliability is by looking at its domain suffix. The domain suffix, the letters that follow the dot, can help you determine who created the website. The most commonly used domain suffixes are described in the following graphic organizer.

Domain Suffix	Definition/Description
.com	Stands for “commercial.” Usually, websites with this suffix intend to make some sort of profit from their Internet services. Typically, these are the websites that sell goods or services.
.org	Stands for “organization.” Primarily used by not-for-profit groups such as charities and professional organizations.
.net	Stands for “network.” Often used by Internet service providers or web-hosting companies.
.edu	Stands for “education.” Used by colleges, universities, educational organizations, or other institutions.
.gov	Stands for “government.” Used by federal, state, and local government sites.

7. Which of the domain suffixes do you associate with more credible information? Why?

Searching for Sources

When using the Internet for research, your first step might be to use a search engine to find sources. Depending on the term you enter into the search a search engine, for example, if you enter the search term “advertising,” you will get many sites

WORD CONNECTIONS

Etymology

The word **bias** comes from the Old French word *biais* and means “slant or slope.” The noun *bias* refers to a preference, especially one that prevents impartial judgment.

13 To evaluate online resources, begin by reviewing the information on the various Internet domain suffixes. Guide students to understand which websites, based on the domain suffixes, would be most likely to provide valid information. Have them apply this information as a further criterion for evaluating sources.

14 Have students read the Searching for Sources information and then answer the questions relating to search terms. Have students share their ideas for search terms with the class and create a class list of viable terms.

15 Have students use search terms to do online research for the research topic. They should choose one or two sites that look useful and then evaluate those sites using the graphic organizer provided.

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16 Have students evaluate the two sources based on the questions in the graphic organizer. Ask students to compare the two sources and say which site was more credible, giving evidence to support their answer. Then have students read about reliability and determine if their sources are reliable.



TEACHER TO TEACHER

Pairs or triads work best for grouping in this activity. It is difficult for groups with more than three members to share a computer.

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because the term is so broad. If you are just looking for information about celebrity endorsements, narrowing your search to that term would give you better results.

8. To research the effect of marketing and advertising to young people, what search terms might you use? Refine your terms to narrow your results as you go.
9. Using your search term(s), find information on the topic of marketing and advertising aimed at young people. Choose one or two sites to explore further. Record the URLs in the graphic organizer that follows. As you look through each site, use the criteria and questions in the graphic organizer to help you decide whether the website provides reliable information without bias.

Search Term	Number of Results	Sites to Explore Further

Criteria	Question	Notes
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it clear who is sponsoring this page? • Is there information available describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization? • Is there a way to verify the credibility of the page's sponsor? (For instance, is a phone number or address available to contact for more information?) • Is it clear who developed and wrote the material? Are his or her qualifications for writing on this topic clearly stated? Is there contact information for the author of the material? 	
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the sources for factual information given so they can be verified? • If information is presented in graphs or charts, is it labeled clearly? • Does the information appear to have errors? 	
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the page and the information from a reliable source? • Is it free of advertising? • If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly separated from the informational content? • Are there any signs of bias? 	
Timeliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do dates on the page indicate when the page was written or last revised? • Are there any other indications that the material is updated frequently to ensure timely information? • If the information is published in print in different editions, is it clear what edition the page is from? 	

Criteria	Question	Notes
Purpose/ Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the site indicate who the intended audience is? Is there any evidence of why the information is provided? 	

Reliability

A source is considered reliable if you can find a pattern of true facts from that source. In order to determine if a source is reliable, you can select facts from that source and look them up in another source. You can also research the source to see if they have been caught presenting wrong information before. Review your sources to determine if they can be considered reliable.

Focus on the Sentence

Think about your analysis of the two websites' credibility. Write two sentences about the websites using the words that follow.

although/credible Although anyone can post on the Internet, some Internet sources are very credible.

since/domain suffix Since my website has the domain suffix .gov, I know that it comes from a government website.

Faulty Reasoning

Sometimes, you can determine the credibility of a source by examining where it came from. Other times, the way that the author uses language can indicate how reliable the text is. When you read sources for your research project, look for faulty reasoning that can reveal an unreliable source.

10. Read the graphic organizer that follows. Then revisit the websites you analyzed and look for examples of faulty reasoning to add to the graphic organizer.

Term	Definition	Sample	Examples from Sources
emotional appeal	statements that create an emotional response in order to persuade the audience	Our children depend on us to protect them from harmful advertising!	
stereotype	a widely held belief about a person or thing that is often an oversimplified idea or opinion	Teenagers want to fit in, so they are especially vulnerable to bandwagon advertisements.	
hyperbole	an exaggerated claim that is not meant to be taken literally	My brother is on social media 24/7. He must see a million ads a week!	

17 Have students complete the Focus on the Sentence. Model the task by constructing a sentence with *although/credible* with the class. Point out that the sentence has a dependent clause, a comma, and an independent clause. Then have students write their own sentences. Check that students are able to use their newly acquired vocabulary terms *credible* and *domain suffix* correctly.

18 Help students identify the terms in the graphic organizer and read the examples of each. Explain that these terms are particularly relevant to advertisements and persuasive and argumentative writing. Have them look for examples of faulty reasoning in the two sites they analyzed.

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19 Review the information on precise language and formal style. Provide examples of domain-specific language, such as *authority* and *reliability*. Have students discuss the examples of precise diction and informal versus formal style. Ask students to create their own examples by having them do **quickwrites** about a topic. Then, as a class, choose two or three to revise from informal to formal language.

20 Have students respond to the informational writing prompt.

ASSESS

Review students' responses to the Focus on the Sentence task to ensure that students understand the meanings of *credibility*, and *domain suffix*. Then evaluate students' responses to the writing prompt to ensure that they are able to correctly use formal, academic language; transitions that create coherence; and a concluding statement that explains why the source is credible.

ADAPT

If students need additional help understanding how to evaluate their sources, guide them as they use the questions in the graphic organizer to evaluate two sources on a topic for which they have prior knowledge. For example, consider using two reviews of an electronic device, one from a reputable organization that offers unbiased reviews and another from a person who recently bought the device.

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Check Your Understanding

Describe how you will check your research sources for faulty reasoning.

LANGUAGE & WRITER'S CRAFT: Revising for Precise Language and Formal Style

When writing for an academic audience, you should use precise and domain-specific language and a formal writing style. Domain-specific language is language related to the topic. When you revise your writing, pay close attention to your word choice: consider how choosing one word instead of another improves your clarity and message. Remember to keep your audience in mind as you revise and publish your writing.

Domain-specific language: Your choice of words (diction) should include the domain-specific terms that you are learning, as they apply to the topic. For example:

Original: The advertisement used a celebrity to help sell its product.

Revised: The advertisement used the advertising technique of a testimonial to sell its product by using the professional athlete Derek Jeter.

Precise language: Another way to strengthen your writing is to provide detailed information about a text or resource you are citing.

Original: In the news story it says that ...

Revised: In the news story from the *New York Times* on Sunday, March 18, the author claims that ...

Formal language: Formal language avoids slang, and it generally does not use contractions. Most slang that you might use in everyday language is too casual for academic writing. Words or phrases you use with your peers may not be understood by different audiences or appropriate for an academic topic.

Original: I'm a teenager, and, like, most of us look at famous people as cool and in the know.

Revised: Teenagers generally believe that famous people are models for their own thoughts and behavior.

PRACTICE In your Reader/Writer notebook, revise the examples that follow to include precise and domain-specific language as well as a formal writing style. Work to eliminate wordiness and redundancy, or unnecessarily repeated ideas. Then, look back at the paragraph you wrote in Activity 2.5. Look for sentences that you can revise for formal language and precise writing.

There was this ad I saw for a video game and it made it seem like everyone wanted one when I watched the video game ad. It's not cool when advertisers use famous people to sell things and convince people something is so great when people might not have wanted it in the first place.

Writing to Sources: Informational Text

Using information from one of your searches, write a paragraph summarizing the information you found about marketing to young people. Be sure to:

- Use precise and formal language to present information.
- Use transitions that create coherence.
- Include a concluding statement that explains why the source is credible, and if the source is also reliable.



WRITING TO SOURCES: INFORMATIONAL TEXT

The following standards are addressed in the writing prompt:

- W.7.2d, W.7.2e
- W.7.2c
- W.7.2f, W.7.8