Evaluating Sources: How Credible Are They?

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
1. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Questions to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Authority</td>
<td>Who is the author? What organization is behind this information? What are the qualifications of the author or organization to write about this topic?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Accuracy</td>
<td>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?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Credibility</td>
<td>Is the information trustworthy? Does it show any biases for or against the topic?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Timeliness</td>
<td>How old is the source? Some sources become dated when new research is available, but other sources of information can remain quite sound.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Purpose/Audience</td>
<td>What is the purpose of the information? To whom is it directed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACTIVITY 2.6

VOCABULARY

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.

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.
2.6

Reading for Credibility

In this part of the activity, you will read a letter to a kids’ magazine publisher. You will practice evaluating the text and another text provided to you by your teacher using the criteria you learned earlier in the activity.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read, underline the reasons and evidence that are mentioned in the text.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

Informational Text

Re: Advertising in the New York Times For Kids

December 20, 2017
Arthur O. Sulzberger, Jr., Chairman
The New York Times Company
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY, 10018

Re: Advertising in the New York Times For Kids
from Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood website

Dear Mr. Sulzberger:

1. We are writing to urge the New York Times (“the Times”) to make future editions of the New York Times For Kids (“the Times For Kids”) advertising-free.

2. We applaud the concept of a children’s supplement of the Times to foster an interest in reading the newspaper. But when we reviewed the November 19, 2017 edition of the Times For Kids, we were dismayed to find that five of its 16 pages—31% of the supplement—were full-page ads for the Google Home Mini.

3. Parents who trust the Times for its well-deserved reputation for journalism likely had no idea the supplement was merely a Trojan horse for Google advertising, particularly if they followed the supplement’s “Editor’s Note” which said, “This section should not be read by grown-ups.” And since the advertisements were unfairly disguised as content, children probably didn’t know they were being targeted with marketing.

4. Marketing directed at children is always unfair. Children are considerably more vulnerable to the effects of advertising than adults. Research has found that most children do not understand the persuasive intent of advertising until they reach the age of 11 or 12.¹ That research is based on children’s additional publication.

foster: develop
dismayed: upset


College and Career Readiness Standards

L.7.3a Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.

Additional Standards Addressed:
RI.7.4, RI.7.6, L.7.3, L.7.4, W.7.5
understanding of television advertising, where regulations dictate clear separation between ads and programming. When such separation doesn't exist, it's even harder for children to recognize and understand advertising.2

5 Such is the case with the November 19 edition of the Times For Kids. 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, with this question at the bottom referring to Google characters embedded in the ads: “Can you find the donut, G, and Android in each drawing?” These advertisements were deceptive to children and violated the guidelines of the Children's Advertising Review Unit, an industry self-regulatory program, which state: “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.”

6 We believe the advertisements also violated the Times' own Advertising Acceptability Manual, which says “Advertisements that, in our opinion, simulate New York Times news or editorial matter or that may be confused with our news or editorial matter are unacceptable.” If such advertisements are unacceptable for all Times readers, they are especially unfair when directed at children.…

7 …The Times has announced it will publish the Times For Kids monthly, beginning in January 2018. Getting kids in the habit of reading your newspaper will undoubtedly pay long-term benefits for The New York Times Company. Rather than trying to squeeze out additional profits at the expense of families who have already paid for the Sunday newspaper, the Times should make future editions of the Times For Kids completely free of advertising. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,
Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood
Center for Digital Democracy
Consumer Action
Consumer Federation of America
Consumer Watchdog
Corporate Accountability
New Dream Parent Coalition for Student Privacy
Public Citizen's Commercial Alert
The Story of Stuff Project

cc: Arthur Gregg Sulzberger, Deputy Publisher, NY Times Sundar Pichai, CEO, Google, Inc. Children's Advertising Review Unit

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 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Re: Advertising in the New York Times For Kids</th>
<th>Outside Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority:</td>
<td>Authority:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy:</td>
<td>Accuracy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility:</td>
<td>Credibility:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness:</td>
<td>Timeliness:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose/Audience:</td>
<td>Purpose/Audience:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain Suffix</th>
<th>Definition/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.com</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.org</td>
<td>Stands for “organization.” Primarily used by not-for-profit groups such as charities and professional organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.net</td>
<td>Stands for “network.” Often used by Internet service providers or web-hosting companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.edu</td>
<td>Stands for “education.” Used by colleges, universities, educational organizations, or other institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.gov</td>
<td>Stands for “government.” Used by federal, state, and local government sites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 will get many sites

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**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.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Term</th>
<th>Number of Results</th>
<th>Sites to Explore Further</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>• Is it clear who is sponsoring this page?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there information available describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 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?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 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?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>• Are the sources for factual information given so they can be verified?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If information is presented in graphs or charts, is it labeled clearly?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Does the information appear to have errors?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>• Is the page and the information from a reliable source?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is it free of advertising?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly separated from the informational content?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are there any signs of bias?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>• Do dates on the page indicate when the page was written or last revised?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are there any other indications that the material is updated frequently to ensure timely information?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If the information is published in print in different editions, is it clear what edition the page is from?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

since/domain suffix

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.

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

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