Evaluating Sources: How Credible Are They?

PLAN

Materials: research sources/ Internet, two preselected websites for evaluation, highlighters
Suggested pacing: 1.5 50-minute class periods

TEACH

1 Now that students have done some preliminary research, they need to understand how to evaluate the sources they are consulting.

2 First, read the introductory paragraph, and then guide students to begin to complete the graphic organizer by predicting or looking up the definition of each source evaluation criterion. Then have students take notes to define each criterion presented.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Predicting, Note-taking, Graphic Organizer

My Notes

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
Credibility comes from the word *credible*, which means "believable or trustworthy."

Learning Targets
- Evaluate research sources for authority, accuracy, credibility, timeliness, and purpose/audience.
- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- Evaluate a website's content and identity to determine appropriate Internet sources for research.

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 both for 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 complete each definition.

Source Criteria	Definition
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	Try to determine if the content of the source is fact, opinion, or propaganda. If you think the source is offering facts, are the sources for those facts clearly indicated?
3. Credibility	Is the information trustworthy? Does it show any biases for or against the topic?
4. Timeliness	How timely is the source? Is the source years out of date? Some information becomes dated when new research is available, but other older sources of information can be quite sound 50 or 100 years later.
5. Purpose/Audience	What is the purpose of the information? To whom is it directed?

2. Look back at the two informational texts in this unit. For each text, write the title in the graphic organizer below. Then evaluate how well the texts meet each of the criteria. Check that you have correct definitions for each term.

Text 1:	Text 2:
Authority:	Authority:
Accuracy:	Accuracy:
Credibility:	Credibility:
Timeliness:	Timeliness:
Purpose/Audience:	Purpose/Audience:

3. Do you think one of these sources is more credible or worthy of your trust than the other? Explain why.

Preview

In this part of the activity, you will read a statement from a government commissioner and practice evaluating the text using the criteria you learned earlier in the activity.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read the text, underline or highlight words or phrases that connect to the topic of marketing to young people.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

My Notes

3 Follow the directions to practice evaluating sources using the two informational texts already presented in the unit. Model for the class how to use the criteria to evaluate the credibility of the first text. Then ask pairs to do the same for the second text.

4 Read the Preview and the Setting a Purpose for Reading sections with your students.

5 **FIRST READ:** Based on the complexity of the passage and your knowledge of your students, you may choose to conduct the first reading in a variety of ways:

- independent reading
- paired reading
- small-group reading
- choral reading
- read aloud

Text Complexity
Overall: Complex
Lexile: 1170L
Qualitative: Low Difficulty
Task: Moderate (Analyze)

6 As students are reading, monitor their progress. Be sure they are engaged with the text and annotating the text for statements that connect to the topic of marketing to young people. Evaluate whether the selected reading mode is effective.

7 Based on the observations you made during the first reading, you may want to adjust your reading mode. For example, you may decide for the second reading to read aloud certain complex passages, or you may group students differently.

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8 SECOND READ: During the second reading, students will be returning to the text to answer the text-dependent comprehension questions. You may choose to have students reread and work on the questions in a variety of ways:

- independently
- in pairs
- in small groups
- together as a class

9 Have students answer the text-dependent questions. If they have difficulty, scaffold the questions by rephrasing them or breaking them down into smaller parts. See the Scaffolding the Text-Dependent Questions boxes for suggestions.

My Notes

Informational Text

Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps

from the Federal Communication Commission website

1 Re: *Children's Television Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters* (MM Docket No. 00-167)

2 Kids today live in a super-saturated media environment. They are interacting with more media more often than at any other time in our nation's history. Television, radio, cable and now the Internet are perhaps the most powerful forces at work in the world today. When used for good, they enlighten minds, convey powerful ideas, educate and lay the foundation for human development. But when they are used to misinform and mislead they can—and sometimes do—inflict lasting harm.

3 We have reason to be concerned. The Kaiser Family Foundation tells us that children are spending over six and a half hours per day exposed to media, almost four hours of that time with television. The average child sees tens of thousands of commercials a year. More disturbing still are studies demonstrating that children eight and younger don't—because they can't—distinguish between advertisements and programming. They accept commercials as true because they don't have the skills and cognitive resources to distinguish between fact and fiction.

4 Congress recognized these tough challenges for parents and the high stakes for children long ago. … Indeed, in the Children's Television Act, Congress specifically directed the Commission to protect children against excessive advertisements on television. …

5 Two years ago, the Commission began the task of updating our policies adopted under the Children's Television Act. The goal was simple: ensuring that our rules continue to serve the interests of children and parents as the country transitions from analog to digital television. … We've had some fits and starts getting this digital children's agenda on the road. But I am pleased today to support this decision. It resolves at long last important outstanding issues regarding the obligation of television broadcasters to protect and serve the children in their audience.

Second Read

- Reread the informational text to answer these text-dependent questions.
- Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. **Key Ideas and Details:** Does the commissioner have a positive, negative, or mixed opinion of media's effect on children? How do you know?

The commissioner has a mixed opinion of the media. In paragraph 1, he says media can "enlighten minds, convey powerful ideas, educate and lay the foundation for human development" but that it can also "inflict lasting harm" if used inappropriately. RI.7.1

SCAFFOLDING THE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

1. Key Ideas and Details (RI.7.1) **Does the commissioner have a positive, negative, or mixed opinion of media's effect on children? How do you know?** In paragraph 2, does the commissioner describe any benefits the media provides? If so, what are they? In the same paragraph, does he describe any negative effects caused by the media? If so, what are they?

2. Key Ideas and Details (RI.7.1) **What evidence does the commissioner provide to support his statement that "We have reason to be concerned"?** What concerns does the commissioner raise? From what source does the commissioner get his information?

2. **Key Ideas and Details:** What evidence does the commissioner provide to support his statement that "We have reason to be concerned"?

He cites research in paragraph 2, saying that children are exposed to six and a half hours of media per day, and that children under the age of eight do not yet have the cognitive ability to understand the difference between advertisements and regular programs. RI.7.1

3. **Key Ideas and Details:** According to the text, what steps has the government taken to regulate the television programming—including advertisements—that children see?

Congress passed the Children's Television Act, which gave the FCC direct responsibility over regulating advertisements directed at children. Then the FCC started the process of updating its policies in order to "ensure that our rules continue to serve the interests of children. ..." RI.7.3

Working from the Text

4. Use the graphic organizer below to further analyze the text. Make inferences—conclusions based on details in the text—and cite specific evidence to support your inferences.

	Statement
Role Who is the author? Where is this text published?	Inference: Evidence:
Audience Who is the intended audience?	Inference: Evidence:
Format How does the format match the intended audience?	Inference: Evidence:
Topic What is the purpose of this text? What is the point of view of the company regarding marketing to youth?	Inference: Evidence:

5. How would you rate this text for the five criteria for evaluating sources? Explain your reasoning.

My Notes

SCAFFOLDING THE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

3. Key Ideas and Details (RI.7.1) **According to the text, what steps has the government taken to regulate the television programming—including advertisements—that children see?** Reread paragraphs 4 and 5. Note that Congress and the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), which author Michael J. Copps refers to simply as "the Commission," are part of the government. What did Congress create and why? What did the FCC do and why?

ACTIVITY 2.6 continued

10 Allow students to collaboratively complete the RAFT chart as a reading strategy to help them analyze the text. This will also ensure that students see how the text can be considered an argumentative (persuasive) text rather than strictly informational.

TEACHER TO TEACHER

All students should complete the RAFT to ensure a thorough analysis. This is also a check of students' reading abilities.

Leveled Differentiated Instruction

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

L2–L3 Guide students in analyzing the author's claim and evidence by using the **Idea and Argument Evaluator** graphic organizer.

L3–L4 Have students work in pairs to complete the **Idea and Argument Evaluator** graphic organizer.

L4–L5 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.

11 Ask students to identify the differences between a primary source and a secondary source and to give examples of each. To transition to the topic of evaluating online sources, help students see that online sources — just like sources found in other formats — 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.).

12 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.

Evaluating Sources: How Credible Are They?

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
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.

My Notes

Primary and Secondary Sources

When choosing credible research 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. Look at the texts you have read so far in the unit. Are they primary or secondary sources? How do you know?

   Both are secondary sources since both are based on polls conducted by their respective companies (Harris Interactive poll and Center for the American Dream poll). The polls would be primary sources.

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. In order to be an effective researcher, you must be aware of the differences in quality that exist among websites.

A good place to start evaluating a website's authority is by looking at its domain suffix. The domain name is the Web address, or Internet identity. The domain suffix, the three letters that follow the dot, is the category in which that website falls. The most commonly used domain suffixes are described below.

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." 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 would lead you to expect that the information was more geared to selling something than giving information?

8. Visit the list of the sites provided by your teacher. Choose two that you want to investigate further in order to practice evaluating online sources. As you surf through the site, use the graphic organizer on the next page to help you decide whether the website provides reliable information without **bias**.
   - Circle "yes" or "no" for each question. You want to be able to answer "yes" to as many of the questions as possible to consider the source reliable and credible.
   - If you are able to answer "yes" to the question, answer the question by taking notes about the site.

   Site 1 _____
   Site 2 _____

9. Is one of the sites you explored more credible (trustworthy) than the other? Why?

Searching for Sources

When using the Internet for research, your first step might be to use a search engine to find sources. Search engines work from a type of index. When you enter a search term that is in the index, the search engine finds websites that also use that word or phrase.

Depending on your search term, a search might return hundreds, thousands, or even millions of possible sites. For example, if you enter the search term "Civil War," you will get pages and pages of sites because the term is so broad. If you are just looking for the Battle of Antietam, narrowing your search to that word would give you better results.

10. How might you choose good sites from your search?

11. To research the effect of marketing and advertising to young people, what search terms might you use?

12. 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 information about the sites (URL, type of information provided, and your comments on the site or the information).

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.

My Notes

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ACTIVITY 2.6 continued

13 Select two websites that address the topic of consumerism and marketing to youth. Try to select one that is reliable and one that is less reliable. If you need help with this step, refer to your school media specialist. If computers are not readily available, you may wish to print out the website information and distribute it to the class. If Internet access is available, send each group to a computer to find each site and evaluate it against the criteria on the graphic organizer. Using the criteria and questions, instruct student groups to complete the activity by thinking "yes" or "no" and noting their responses.

TEACHER TO TEACHER

It is important to evaluate the websites ahead of time so you are aware of the content and any obstacles students may run into. Pairs or triads work best for grouping in this activity. It is difficult for groups with more than three members to share a computer.

14 Ask each group to share its site evaluations with other groups.

15 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.

16 Finally, 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.

Evaluating Sources: How Credible Are They?

Criteria	Question	Yes/No	Site 1	Site 2
Authority	1. Is it clear who is sponsoring the creation and maintenance of the page? 2. Is there information available describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization? 3. Is there a way to verify the authority of the page's sponsor? For instance, is a phone number or address available to contact for more information? 4. 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?	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No	Notes:	Notes:
Accuracy	1. Are the sources for factual information given so they can be verified? 3. If information is presented in graphs or charts, is it labeled clearly? 4. Does the information appear to have errors?	Yes No Yes No Yes No		
Credibility	1. Is the page and the information from a reliable source? 2. Is it free of advertising? 3. If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly separated from the informational content? 4. Are there any signs of bias?	Yes No Yes No Yes No Yes No		
Timeliness	1. Do dates on the page indicate when the page was written or last revised? 2. Are there any other indications that the material is updated frequently to ensure timely information? 3. If the information is published in print in different editions, is it clear what edition the page is from?	Yes No Yes No Yes No		
Purpose/ Audience	1. Does the site indicate who the intended audience is? 2. Is there any evidence of why the information is provided?	Yes No Yes No		

Language and Writer's Craft: Revising for Precise Language and Formal Style

Most of your explanatory writing will be for an academic audience. For this audience, you should use precise language and a formal writing style.

Precise language: Your choice of words (diction) should include the academic vocabulary and literary 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.

Another way to be precise 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.

Check Your Understanding

Describe how you will check the authority, accuracy, credibility, timeliness, and purpose/audience of one website you identified as a source for your research.

Writing to Sources: Explanatory 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.

My Notes

17 Review the information on precise language and formal style. 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.

18 Have students respond to the explanatory writing prompt.

▶ ASSESS

Review students' responses to the Check Your Understanding task to ensure that students understand the meanings of *authority, accuracy, credibility, timeliness*, and *purpose/ audience*, and have a specific plan for evaluating the website they chose. 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 simple sources, one reliable and one less reliable, 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.