

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 below. 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.
- 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.



Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

Focus Standards:

- 7.8(F) Analyze characteristics of multimodal and digital texts
7.12(D) Identify and gather relevant information from a variety of sources.
7.12(E) Differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

- 7.12(F) Synthesize information from a variety of sources.
7.12(H)(i) Examine sources for reliability, credibility, and bias.

Additional Standards Addressed:

- 7.2(A), 7.2(B), 7.5(G), 7.6(C), 7.6(D), 7.6(E), 7.10(C), 7.10(D)(i), 7.12(A), 7.12(C), 7.12(H)(ii)

ACTIVITY 2.6 *continued*

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

4 FIRST READ: Conduct a shared reading of the informational text in this activity. Pause at the end of the second paragraph and ask students how this text connects to ideas presented in the other texts they've read in this unit. Elicit a few responses before continuing with the reading.



TEXT COMPLEXITY

Overall: Complex

Lexile: 1060L

Qualitative: Moderate Difficulty

Task: Moderate (Analyze)

5 As students are reading, monitor their progress. Be sure they are annotating the text by underlining media types and circling unfamiliar words. Remind them that they can revisit the unfamiliar words after they finish reading the text the first time.

2.6

My Notes

Handwriting practice lines consisting of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line.

Reading for Credibility

In this part of the activity, you will read a statement from a government commissioner. 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 names of the different types of media mentioned in the text. 7.5(G), 7.6(E)
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary. 7.2(A), 7.2(B), 7.6(E)

Informational Text

Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps

by the Federal Communications Commission website

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 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.

Working from the Text

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. According to the text, what steps has the government taken to regulate the television programming—including advertisements—that children can see? How does the commissioner use these details to support his argument?

Congress passed the Children’s Television Act, which gave the FCC responsibility over regulating advertisements directed at children. Then the FCC began updating its policies to “ensure that our rules continue to serve the interests of children.” The commissioner presents this information to confirm that the problem is so important, the government had to step in.

5. Your teacher will provide you with an outside source to read. Read the text closely. Then use the graphic organizer below to evaluate “Statement of the Commissioner Michael J. Copps” and the text provided to you by your teacher based on the five criteria to determine reliability.

| Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps | Outside Source |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Authority: | Authority: |
| Accuracy: | Accuracy: |
| Credibility: | Credibility: |
| Timeliness: | Timeliness: |
| Purpose/Audience: | Purpose/Audience: |

- 6 Guide students to respond to the Working From the Text questions by working in small groups to reread the text and respond to the questions. Remind them to use evidence in their responses. Move from group to group and listen in as students answer the questions.

ACTIVITY 2.6 continued

7 Share with students the statement on marketing to children from the Internet. Allow students to read the statement and ask them to turn to a partner and discuss the purpose of the text.

8 Allow students to collaboratively complete the chart in order to analyze the two texts.

LEVELED DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

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

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

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

ADV+ 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.

9 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.).

2.6

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.

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, and so is the statement from Michael J. Copps.

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 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." 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 engine, a search might return hundreds, thousands, or even millions of possible sites. For example, if you enter the search term “advertising,” you will get many sites 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?
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 below. As you look through each site, use the graphic organizer to help you decide whether the website provides reliable information without bias.

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.

10 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.

11 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.

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

| 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? | |

ACTIVITY 2.6 continued

13 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.

14 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.

15 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.

2.6

| 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 below.

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 below. 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! | |

 **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 language and a formal writing style. 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.

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.

PRACTICE Look back at the paragraph you wrote in Activity 2.5. Look for sentences that you can revise for formal language and precise writing.

 **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.

16 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.

17 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.