Section:

*Evaluating Information*

Lesson:

*Evaluating Information*

**Learning Objectives:**

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify scholarly information using consciously selected criteria
- Determine whether information should be incorporated into an assignment and/or be trusted
- Determine potential bias of information source
- Perform additional research to verify information

**Components:**

- Video - Evaluating Sources
- Video - Citation Needed
- Quiz - Evaluating Information

**Introduction (real world relevance):**

In making arguments and decisions based on information, always evaluate sources to determine their purpose, validity, and accuracy. This will not only help in your academic career, but will also help after you graduate in everything from determining reliable news sources to finding trustworthy products.

**Discussion Topics:**

*The Importance of Using Scholarly Sources*

Why do scholarly sources matter? When and why are they more useful than non-scholarly information?

*Evaluation Criteria*

Discuss what authority means. Why do credentials or academic/research associations matter? What about the author's background and/or publication history? Does the publisher matter? Why or why not? This might be a good place to take a look at predatory publishers.
Website Evaluation
Discuss the differences among .edu, .com, .gov, .org, etc. Many students take these url designations for granted and don’t understand the importance or usefulness of these designations.

Accuracy
Can the information be verified via cited sources? Does it agree with other sources? If not, do students conduct more research? Has information about methodology been included? How much time do students put into determining accuracy? Are there time constraints? Are there shortcuts?

Currency
Is currency important for your subject/topic? Can you determine when the information was produced/published? If the information is dated, but otherwise good for your project, look for more recent work from the same author. Does the information need to be examined from a historical or cultural perspective?

Coverage
Is the scope appropriate for your topic? What is the focus? What information is included/excluded? If it describes research, is there information about the sample used in the research? Is the sample representative of the population?

Objectivity
What is the purpose of the work? Does the work offer facts, opinions, or a combination? What is the tone of the work? What assumptions does it make?

Audience
Is this a scholarly publication? Trade information? General? If it is a webpage, is it part of a larger site? Is there an expectation of prior knowledge or assumptions?

Evaluating Non-scholarly Sources
The same principles apply as scholarly sources, but with less emphasis on scholarly information requirement. For non-scholarly resources, make sure to understand the motivation of the information provider. Ask questions and verify information across multiple resources.
Activities:

Ask students to find two unacceptable sources on a topic relevant to an academic assignment, and one acceptable source. Ask the students to write a paragraph or essay describing the evaluation process, their observations, and decision for each of the three sources. If time permits, have students share reasons for finding a site unacceptable for an academic assignment.

More Resources:

“Crap Detection, A 21st Century Literacy” - https://librariesandtransliteracy.wordpress.com/2010/09/16/crap-detection-a-21st-century-literacy/ - in the Libraries and Transliteracy blog. An alternative to the evaluation categories listed above, with category names forming the acronym CRAP.