

Assessing Web Site Credibility

This modelling the tools is incorporated into critical challenges at grades 6, 10, 11 and 12, however, it can be adapted for use at all grade levels.

Overview

These activities help students learn to judge the authority and credibility of information posted on the Internet. There are two formats suggested: a comparative assessment of two Web sites (one of which is bogus) in light of nine criteria; and a pro and con assessment of individual Web sites using four criteria. Either format can be used as an independent activity or integrated into a research project. Students begin by discussing under what conditions an author is an authority on a topic and briefly apply these criteria to simple examples. Next, students are introduced to the selected format and directed to assess the credibility of Web sites that you provide or that students identify themselves.

Preplanning

Select credibility rating format.

- Included in this challenge are two formats for assessing the credibility of Internet sites:
 - [Comparing Web Site Credibility](#) is a comparative chart that invites students to assess two Web sites on a similar topic in light of nine criteria. Below is a list of several pairs of Web sites, with each pair containing one reliable site and one bogus site. If these topics do not match your curriculum focus, locate or create your own pair of suitable sites. This lesson works best if one site is plausible looking, but bogus. If needed, you can download and modify a legitimate site to create a bogus site.
 - [Exploring Web Site Credibility](#) is a pro and con chart that invites students to look for the merits and shortcomings of a single Web site in light of four criteria. These four criteria do not presuppose that students have a background on the topic. This lesson works best if the site is plausible looking, but bogus. If needed, you can download and modify a legitimate site to create a bogus site.

Either format can be used as a stand-alone activity. If working with students in the context of a specific research project, ask students to assess a common sample site or pair of sites and then assess several additional sites identified through their own Internet search.

Select suitable Web sites.

- Depending on the format selected, either one or two demonstration Web sites are needed. As stated above, we recommend using a plausible-looking bogus site. Below is a list of paired Web sites, with each pair containing one reliable site and one bogus site. (Only the bogus site would be used with [Exploring Web Site Credibility](#) chart.) Do not suggest to students that there is anything wrong with the sites. Also, if students are accessing these

sites by computer, give only the Web site address (URL) as the title might influence students. Notice whether or not students carefully read the title when they go to the site.

Web Site Pairs

Unreliable (Bogus) Sites	Reliable Sites
California's Velcro Crop under Challenge http://home.inreach.com/kumbach/velcro.html	Welcome to the Velcro Companies http://www.velcro.com/
Dream Technologies (Clone Я-Us) http://www.d-b.net/dti/	University of Hawaii News http://www.hawaii.edu/ur/News_Releases/NR_July98/cloning.html
SkyHigh Airlines www.skyhighairlines.com/main.asp	WestJet http://c1dsp.westjet.com/guest/home.shtml?language=EN&fromSplash=true
The True but Little Known Facts about Women and AIDS, with documentation http://147.129.226.1/library/research/AIDSFACTS.htm	amfAR, American Foundation for AIDS Research http://www.amfar.org/
Feline Reactions to Bearded Men http://www.sree.net/stories/feline.html	Behavior Problems in Cats http://www.peteducation.com/category_summary.cfm?cls=1&cat=1310
Mankato, MN, Home Page http://city-mankato.us/	Elephant Butte http://www.elephantbuttecoc.com/
Republic of Molossia http://www.molossia.org/	Welcome to digital Liechtenstein http://www.liechtenstein.li/en/liechtenstein_main_sites/portal_fuerstentum_liechtenstein/home.htm
The Jackalope Conspiracy http://www.sudftw.com/jackcon.htm	Endangered Species http://www.worldwildlife.org/endangered/

Session One

Introduce concept of authority.

- Lead a class discussion on the relationship between "author" and "authority" by considering the following questions:
What does it mean to say that someone is an author?
What does it mean to say that someone is an authority on a topic?
Are all authors authorities on their topic? Why not?
Under what conditions would an author be an authority?

Record student-suggested conditions on the board under the title "Criteria for Credible Authorities."

Practise assessing credibility.

- Invite students to extend and apply criteria for credible authorities by assessing several fictitious Internet sites. Make an overhead of [Credible Web Site Authorities?](#) chart and discuss each example as a class. Alternatively, distribute a copy to each student or pair of students. If completing the activity orally, after reading each example ask students to indicate their rating using the "fist of five" technique. Students hold up any number of fingers from five (which is the highest rating) to a closed fist (which is zero, the lowest rating). Ask students to provide reasons for their rating and, if they decide the source is not very credible, to suggest a more appropriate source of information for researching the topic. Add any newly suggested factors to the posted list of "Criteria for Credible Authorities."

Pose the critical question.

- When students understand some of the relevant factors for assessing credibility, introduce the critical challenge:

Assess the credibility of Internet sites on a current research topic.

Explain the assignment.

- The sequence of these activities depends on the format you have selected, but the common elements are as follows:
 1. Distribute the appropriate data chart to each student or pair of students—either [Comparing Web Site Credibility](#) or [Exploring Web Site Credibility](#). For ease of student use, you may want to enlarge these blackline masters to 11 " x 17 ".
 2. Referring to the left-hand column of the appropriate blackline master, explain each of the criteria that students should consider.
 3. Explain the procedures for completing each chart. For [Comparing Web Site Credibility](#), students should collect specific evidence relevant to each criterion for both

Web sites. They should then rate each site using the scale provided. For [Exploring Web Site Credibility](#), students should identify positive and negative features of the site relevant to each criterion and then indicate the implications of each feature for or against the believability of the site. Illustrate the difference between a feature, e.g., the site is sponsored by Block University, and the implications of that feature; e.g., a university might normally be a credible sponsor; Block University could be a "fly-by-night" operation and may not be credible at all.

4. Provide students with the Web sites to assess, either by distributing hard copies or by providing the URLs for students to access on a computer. The availability of computer terminals may determine whether students work in partners or small teams.

Session Two

Debrief the activity.

- After students have evaluated their Web sites, invite them to present their findings to the class. Encourage students to appreciate that careful examination of the details of a bogus site is needed if errors are to be detected. Arrange for students to discuss the following questions in writing, orally as a class or in conversation with another student:
When did you discover the bogus Web site? What was your reaction?
What have you learned about using the Internet from this activity?
Will this activity change the way you will do research in the future?

Option: Extend to research project.

- If students are about to research a topic, direct them to use the selected format to assess at least four Web sites and select the most credible site. In addition to gathering evidence on each site using copies of either rating scale, students may use [Overall Web Site Assessment](#) to justify their final choice. Prior to this activity, provide students with feedback on the demonstration assignment using the assessment rubric in either [Assessing the Web Site Ratings](#) or [Assessing the Web Site Strengths and Weaknesses](#).

Assessment

Assess credibility ratings.

- Assess students' rating of the credibility of the two Web sites as recorded on [Comparing Web Site Credibility](#) chart using the rubric found in [Assessing the Web Site Ratings](#). According to this rubric, the assignment is based on three criteria:
 - identifies relevant evidence
 - includes important points
 - justifies ratings.

Assess strengths and weaknesses.

- Assess students' identification of the Web sites' strengths and weaknesses as recorded on [Exploring Web Site Credibility](#) chart using the rubric found in [Assessing the Website Strengths and Weaknesses](#). According to this rubric, the assignment is based on four criteria:
 - identifies relevant features
 - offers plausible implications
 - includes important points
 - justifies conclusion.

Assess the final selection.

- Assess students' justification of the more/most credible Web site as recorded on [Overall Web Site Assessment](#) chart using the rubric found in [Assessing the Website Final Selection](#). According to this rubric, the assignment is based on two criteria:
 - identifies strengths of preferred Web site
 - identifies strengths of weaker Web site(s).

Credits

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Assessment support provided by the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC) in collaboration with The Critical Thinking Consortium.

Documents

The following documents are referenced in the above modelling the tools. They can be adapted for your needs and re-saved.

Graphic Organizers

- [Comparing Web Site Credibility](#) 
- [Exploring Web Site Credibility](#) 
- [Credible Web Site Authorities?](#) 
- [Overall Web Site Assessment](#) 

Assessment

- [Assessing the Web Site Ratings](#) 
- [Assessing the Web Site Strengths and Weaknesses](#) 
- [Assessing the Final Web Site Selection](#) 