

- The Smithsonian Office of Education offers students research activities for evaluating historical sources. Students can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of selected primary and secondary sources at www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Smithson-to-Smithsonian/lesson1.pdf

Suggested Internet Sources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- **big6.com/**
The Big6™ web site offers a model for explaining research skills and information literacy to students.
- **www.quick.org.uk/menu.htm**
The Quality Information Checklist offers eight entertaining strategies for web site evaluation.
- **www.sdst.org/rguide/index.html**
Springfield Township School's Virtual Library catalogs strategies, procedures and detailed examples for completing a research project.

Suggested Print Sources

- Spangenburg, Ray & Kit Moser. *Savvy Surfing on the Internet: Searching and Evaluating Web Sites*. Enslow Publishers, Berkeley Heights, NJ; 2001.
- Valenza, Joyce Kasman. *Power Research Tools: Learning Activities & Posters*. American Library Association, Chicago, IL; 2003.
- Wolinsky, Art. *Internet Power Research Using the Big6 Approach*. Enslow Publishers, Berkeley Heights, NJ; 2002.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES

- AVOIDING PLAGIARISM
- EVALUATING SOURCES
 - MEDIA LITERACY
- ORGANIZING RESEARCH
- PRESENTING & COMMUNICATING RESEARCH
- SEARCHING THE INTERNET

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Evaluating Sources

Grades 7-12

Through the Internet and print sources, students now have access to billions of pieces of information. The ability to select and use the best of this information to answer a question or to support a choice is an essential life skill. This series guides students to use a variety of search techniques, evaluation strategies and organizational plans to produce high quality research products. Each episode addresses the recursive cycle of the research process as supported by the American Library Association's standards for "information literacy":

- Identify the question or focus
- Search and access a variety of sources
- Select, analyze and evaluate resources
- Analyze and synthesize information
- Communicate and present information
- Evaluate the product and the process



Program Summary

The Web and print sources allow students access to billions of pieces of information, but unfortunately not all of it, especially on the Web, is reliable. Evaluating these information sources is an essential research skill that is used throughout a lifetime. In *Evaluating Sources*, students demonstrate how to find reliable information from electronic and print sources by using the system of CARRDSS, a mnemonic device that can be a useful tool in evaluation:

Credibility — The quality and capacity of belief.

- Who is the author? What are his or her credentials? Education? Experience? Affiliations?
- What evidence is offered of his or her knowledge?

Accuracy — Freedom from mistake and error.

- Can facts, statistics or other information be verified through other sources?
- Do there appear to be errors on the page (i.e., spelling, grammar, facts)?

Reliability — The extent to which a source gives the same information as other sources.

- Does the source present a particular view or bias?
- Is the information affiliated with an organization that has a particular political or social agenda?

Relevance — The relationship to the focused topic or question.

- Does the information directly support the thesis or help to answer the question?
- Can it be eliminated or ignored because it simply does not help?

Date — The time at which an information source is published or produced.

- Does this project need current, up-to-date information?
- When was this Web page created? When was it last updated?

Source — A primary reference work or point of origin.

- Is the information based on primary or secondary sources?
- Did the author document his or her sources?
- What kind of links or further reading did the author choose?

Scope & purpose — The range of information on a given topic and the reason behind its creation.

- Does this source address the thesis in a comprehensive or peripheral way?
- Is it material that can easily be read and understood?

These questions should be posed each time a research source is considered. If a source does not pass any element of the CARRDSS test, it should not be used. Another strategy designed for evaluating Web content is to examine the end, or suffix of a domain name, to help gauge the validity of the information and potential bias. The suffix identifies who the source of information is and therefore what their purpose in conveying information might be. The most familiar is **.com**, a commercial site. The purpose of a commercial site is to sell a product or service, so there is a built-in bias that you must be aware of. Other examples include:

- .ac** — An educational institution (like **.edu**).
- .biz** — A business that could be trying to sell a product or service.
- .edu** — A school, university, museum, or educational site.

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.gov — A U.S. government site.

.int — An international institution.

.mil — A U.S. military site.

.museum — A museum.

.name — An individual Internet user.

.net — A network service provider; Internet administrative site.

.org — An organization, often non-profit. These sites can provide accurate information, but usually have bias.

.pro — A professional's site.

~ (**tilde**) or % — A personal site that varies in its credibility.

Vocabulary

The following words are included for teacher reference and for use with students to refresh and extend the subject matter in the show.

bias — A personal judgment.

evaluation — The act of determining the value or worth of something by careful study or observation.

free Web — The part of the Web that is accessible by search engines.

hyperlink — The "hot" part of a Web page (which might be highlighted text, an image, a table, etc.) that links users to another part of a web page or another document on the Web.

link check — A technique used in web site evaluation that locates and examines the quality of sites by showing what sites are linked to a specific URL. Perform a link check by typing "link:" followed by the site address.

subscription databases — Web-based services that offer premium content inaccessible by standard search engines.

URL (Uniform Resource Locator) — The address of the web site, usually beginning with "http://..."

web site — An organized collection of web pages.

World Wide Web (WWW, the Web) — A global collection of information on the Internet that can be read and interacted with by a computer.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does the Web present special challenges to the process of evaluation?
2. Why is it important to evaluate your own research?
3. How can you evaluate sites by using result lists?
4. What is bias? How can it affect your research?

Follow-Up Activities

- Select three to five sites relating to a school subject that students are currently studying. Have the students work in groups to evaluate these sites and rank them according to their quality of information for their specific purpose.
- Students can create a visual display of CARRDSS. Post the display for easy reference during research work.
- Evaluation of the students' own research is a critical component of the research process. Divide students into pairs to discuss how they can use CARRDSS with their own product.

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