INSIGHTS

FOR FAMILIES

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Evaluating content credibility

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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Accusations of "fake news" have been thrown around in recent months. If the leader in the highest office in the country labels some of the most visible and, arguably, credible mainstream media outlets "fake," then how can we expect students to be able to judge the trustworthiness of websites and digital information?

Students need to learn how to tell the fake news and bogus sites from the credible sources. They should build skills that help them ask? Is the information corroborated by other sources or replicated by other research? What is the background of the person providing the information – is he or she an acknowledged or credentialed expert? What is the nature of the organization providing the platform – a respected news outlet or simple blog, etc. And these skills should be reinforced at home and school.

Who can we trust and why does it matter?

This is not a new problem. Ever since the World Wide Web allowed anyone with basic coding skills to post content, the public has had to sort through false or inaccurate information. And even before that – long before – paid advertising sometimes made dubious claims.

There are many reasons students must be able to find believable sources and content for school work. We expect that academic assignments are factual. If the credibility of sources used for academic projects is debatable, then students must choose them carefully enough to be able to defend them.

These skills will benefit students long after graduation when they are adults and search for information about health concerns and finances.

Developing the ability to evaluate online information

According to recent studies, students have a lot to learn. In a study by the University of Connecticut that included 1,429 seventh-grade students from 40 districts in two states, "fewer than four percent of students could correctly identify the author of an online information source, evaluate that author's expertise and point of view, and make informed judgments about the overall reliability of the site they were reading." *http://bit.ly/2nx1r9F*

This study showed that girls performed better than boys, and students from lower income families had the greatest difficulty with the critical evaluation tests.

"The results are alarming," said study author Elena Forzani. "The ability to critically evaluate the expertise and trustworthiness of source material is critically important when reading online."
The recommendation from researchers? Increase instruction to help improve critical thinking.

Does it meet the CRAAP test?

Fortunately, there are helpful, credible online sources of information to help students build skills for evaluating the credibility of sources of information – online and in printed materials. These sites are useful for parents and students, and they can also serve as a good reminder for educators to weave lessons into their curriculum.

Students should learn to watch for signs of legitimacy, such as a standard URL extension (.com, .edu, .gov), an about this site link, a contact us tab, and advertising (if any) that is separate from the content section.

A credibility test that students can remember is CRAAP, a test that will get students' attention and help them evaluate information. *http://bit.ly/2nu27vC*

Currency: The timeliness of the information
When was the information published? Has it been revised or updated? Does your topic require current information, or will older sources work? If online, do the links work?

Relevance: The importance of the information for your needs.
Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question? Who is the intended audience? Is the information not too elementary or advanced for your needs? Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use? Would you be comfortable citing this source in your research paper?

Authority: The source of the information.
Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor? What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations? Is the author qualified to write on the topic? Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address? Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source (examples: .com .edu .gov .org .net)?

Accuracy: The reliability, truthfulness and correctness of the content.
Where does the information come from? Is the information supported by evidence? Has the information been reviewed or refereed? Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge? Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion? Are there spelling, grammar or typographical errors?

Purpose: The reason the information exists.
What is the purpose of the information? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade? Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions clear? Is the information fact, opinion or propaganda? Does the point of view appear objective and impartial? Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional or personal biases?

Other Resources

The 5 Ws of Website Evaluation
www.schrockguide.net/uploads/3/9/2/2/392267/5ws.pdf
How to Evaluate Web Resources
www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/evaluating-web-resources/
Annenberg Classroom Credibility Challenge
www.annenbergclassroom.org/page/the-credibility-challenge
Current news on legitimacy and credibility of current viral web content
www.snopes.com