3. EVALUATING SOURCES AND UNDERSTANDING EVIDENCE

To provide your students with a broad overview of the principles of evaluating sources, identifying bias and misinformation, refer to the following materials:

- Evaluating Sources
- How to Identify and Debunk Fake News
- What is Authority?
- Introduction to Bias
- Types of Bias
- Purpose and Value of Evidence

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Evaluating Information
Begin a real-world conversation about evaluation. Examples may include medical topics, large purchases, news sources, social media, mockumentaries, gossip, etc. Ask students how they would go about evaluating information they find on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media platforms. Have students ever encountered a documentary or mockumentary? How did they tell the difference? Do students question news sources? Do they look at multiple sources of information when encountering a news story that catches their interests? Investigate those sources for motives or bias before accepting their version?

The Importance of Using Scholarly Sources
Why do scholarly sources matter? When and why are they more useful than non-scholarly information?

Evaluation Criteria

Authority
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.

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 or topic? Can you determine when the information was produced or published? If the information is outdated, but otherwise applicable to your project, look for more recent work from the same author. Does the information need to be examined from a historical or cultural perspective?
Relevance
Is the scope appropriate for your topic? What is the focus? What information is included and/or 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 web page, 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 to scholarly sources, but with less emphasis on scholarly information requirement. For non-scholarly resources, including alternative types of digital media like podcasts or video logs, make sure to understand the motivation of the information provider. Ask questions and verify information across multiple resources.

Objectivity in Reporting
Objective vs. persuasive journalism: Opinion and persuasive examples include accounts, columns, commentary, op-eds, and reviews. Look at word choices, tone, and design.

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 them.

ACTIVITIES

Evaluating a Source
Ask students to find 2 unacceptable sources and 1 that is acceptable on a topic relevant to an academic assignment. They should write a paragraph or essay describing the evaluation process, their observations, and decision for each of the 3 sources. If time permits, have students share reasons for finding a site unacceptable for an academic assignment.

Visual Evaluation
Pick an article with an image from a local print newspaper or from an online piece of journalism. Give the students 2 to 5 minutes to read the article and ask them to write a 1-minute essay about how the image contributes to the story. Have students share their findings with the class or in small groups.
Describing a Source
Either provide a health article citing a study(ies) from a popular news site, such as the BBC or The New York Times, or ask students to find one. Direct students to locate the original source of any statistics and identify:

- Who created this information (study authors)
- Where the study originally was published
- The purpose of the study
- The source of the data
- A description of the population
- A description of the sample
- A short definition of the problem
- A short definition of the variables for the statistic reported in the newspaper
- Benchmark variables
- Questions about how the data may be flawed

If time allows, ask the students to find benchmark variables and write an evaluation of the statistic.

Evaluating News Sources
Have your students examine the infographic below and discuss what they see. Discussion questions might include: What do you notice about the funding sources for the new organization described in this infographic? How might revenue sources influence the content of a particular news organization? What, if anything, do you think news organizations can do to minimize bias or influence from funding sources?

Another activity to accompany the infographic would involve asking your students to locate 2 to 3 news reports from the different news organizations on the same topic and compare them, taking into account what they have learned about their funding. Ask them: What, if any, alignment does the angle of the news piece have with a particular point of view? Is the perspective what you expected, given the funding sources? Do you think this source succeeds in being objective? Why or why not?
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**FOLLOWING THE $$$ TRAIL:**
NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, INC.

- **website:** npr.org
- **17 FOREIGN BUREAUS**
- **Incorporated in 1970 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit**

**MISSION STATEMENT**
"To work in partnership with Member Stations to create a more informed public — one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding and appreciation of events, ideas, and cultures. To accomplish our mission, we produce, acquire, and distribute programming that meets the highest standards of public service in journalism and cultural expression; we represent our members in matters of their mutual interest; and we provide satellite interconnection for the entire public radio system."

**THERE ARE CURRENTLY**
**23 MEMBERS ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- **12 member station managers elected by fellow member stations**
- **9 public directors (prominent members of the public selected by the board and confirmed by NPR Member Stations)"**

**MEMBER STATIONS**
- Are independent, and locally-owned and operated
- 2/3 are affiliated with colleges or universities
- 1/3 are owned by community-based boards

**MEMBER STATION REVENUE**
- 80% increase in NPR's financial statement
- Many receive grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, created by Congress in 1967
- Member stations pay annual dues and pay to use broadcast NPR programs

**CURRENT LEADERS**
- **Roger LaMay,** CEO of NPR Foundation
- **Jarl Mohn,** CEO of NPR
- **Howard Wollner,** CFO of NPR Foundation

**ANNUAL SOURCES OF REVENUE**
- **39% MEMBERSHIP**
  - Dues and fees paid by member stations
  - Underwriting—announcements made on air about a business—paid by corporate sponsors
- **24% CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP**
  - Financial support from companies and organizations that sponsor corporate sponsorship and are held to NPR's ethical standards
  - "NPR makes decisions about national corporate sponsors based on principles established by NPR's Board of Directors"
- **15% OTHER SOURCES**
  - Donations from individuals and nonprofits
  - Grants and contributions
- **14% GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**
  - From institutions and nonprofits
  - Grants can support member stations
- **8% NPF FOUNDATION**
  - "Enhances current and long-term financial support for NPR"
  - Managed by 60 Board of Trustees members
  - Donor Privacy
    - Statement asserts NPR "generally refrains from disclosing information about its donors" through its pledge solicitation programs and does not sell "names of its donors above a certain level"

**REFERENCES**

[Link to references and sources]

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https://corp.credoreference.com/
855.292.6100 - support@credoreference.com