Evaluating Online Sources

CAL STATE LA

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

By completing this worksheet, you will:

- Use lateral reading to identify potential biases or controversies associated with an organization publishing online sources.
- Identify the type and appropriateness of sources used to make claims.
- Defend a position on whether your source should be included or excluded from a bibliography for future Cal State LA students, citing three reasons.
- Reflect on your role as a reader including your personal relationship with the information.

I. Find a Source
(Complete during the library workshop)

Search Google for an article on a topic that interests you. The article should be a popular source written for the general public, such as an article published by a news, magazine, or similar organization?

1. What is the title of the article? What is the name of the author(s)?

2. What is the name of the organization or company that published the article? Do you know anything about this organization already? If so, what?

3. Take a moment to skim the article. Do you think the source can be trusted? In the space below, write down some factors or criteria that you used to evaluate the source.

II. Practice Lateral Reading
(Complete during the library workshop)

Lateral Reading: When a reader opens new tabs and searches outside the original source to learn more about the publisher, the author, or the claims and quotes, they are reading laterally. Rather than focus on reading the source from top-to-bottom (vertically), they read along the horizontal axis to answer the question:

Who is behind the information?

1. Read other websites: Open a new tab and Google the name of the organization that published the article. Find websites that provide information about the organization.

Website 1 and information found:

Website 2 and information found:

2. Check Wikipedia OR Snopes.com: Can you find Wikipedia or Snopes information about the organization or a related person? If so, summarize one major claim made by the website.

What source is cited by Wikipedia or Snopes to support the claim above? What kind of source is it? Another website? A scholarly journal? How reliable is the cited source? Explain how you decided.

3. Summarize your findings: What did you learn about the organization through these sources?

Example description: The Center for Immigration Studies: CIS is a research organization that advocates for much less immigration to the U.S. Its anti-immigration stance makes it controversial; for example, the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled CIS a "hate group" because it "attack[s] or malign[s] an entire class of people" (immigrants). However, PolitiFact reported that it found the "hate group" designation "based on some of its associations rather than its current work." In any case, CIS has a strong anti-immigration stance.*

*Example from: SHEG (Stanford History Education Group). 2021. "Lateral Reading Resources and Practice."

III. Reflection: Putting it All Together
(Complete after the library workshop)

Write a one-page mini-essay in the space below answering the following prompt:

- **Do you recommend this resource be offered up to the Cal State LA community at large in a Community Reading List designed to inform others about your topic? Why or why not?**

Be sure to also answer the following questions:

- What is your relationship to this article? Are you a customer? A potential recruit? A concerned citizen? Why was it written and why are you reading it?
- Does this source reflect your definition of a good source? Provide at **least three reasons** (hint, see worksheet)