
RESEARCH

5-10 days

DEVELOPING IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING AND THE SKILLS NEEDED TO EVALUATE SOURCES

OVERVIEW

Research is, of course, crucial to any social movement. In addition to using research to support one's arguments, research can affect students' opinions, prepare them for discussions and counter-arguments, and allow them to prove the worth of their cause. Although research, especially *good* research, can be difficult, we have laid out a number of parameters that can be followed, attaching worksheets for student use. We recommend having the school librarian/media specialist introduce students to the resources on hand.

An examination of bias (both students' own and bias in sources) is also crucial. Giving students the time and motivation to consider bias is of utmost importance. Students must also be required to research alternatives to their own ideas—especially those alternatives that directly conflict with their positions. While the worksheets encourage such behavior, teacher support in finding sources that provide alternative views promotes a more open and nuanced understanding of the issues, which leads to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of politics in general.

This unit is relatively brief, but students' research will continue throughout the semester.

COLORADO CIVICS STANDARDS ADDRESSED: 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 4.3

SAMPLE JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- What is the most interesting information you have found so far? Why is it interesting?
- Does your research support your original view? Or has research proven that another approach may be better?
- How can you recognize bias in a source? How can you recognize your own biases?
- If you saw an interesting article in the newspaper, how could you verify information in the article?
- What are your strongest research skills? What skills could still use improvement?
- Why do you think that Barack Obama said, "I will listen to you, especially when we disagree" during his victory speech on November 4, 2008?

VOCABULARY

Authenticity: The quality of being trustworthy or genuine.

Bias: An inclination to one point of view, prejudice.

Boolean search: A reference search that uses the words *and*, *or*, *not*, and *near* to limit, widen, and define a search.

Citation: Quoting or referencing an authoritative source as a way of documenting information; also the formal description of the source.

Peer review: Prepublication evaluation of an article or book by a professional in the same field as the author to verify the quality and publication-worthiness of the material.

Research: Close and careful investigation or inquiry.

RESOURCES

Internet Search Engines:

Google, www.google.com

Yahoo-based GoodSearch, <http://www.goodsearch.com> (user can designate a charity to receive one cent for each search conducted)

DogPile, www.dogpile.com

News Sites:

The New York Times, www.nyt.com

The Los Angeles Times, www.latimes.com

The Denver Post, www.denverpost.com

The Rocky Mountain News, www.rockymountainnews.com

BBC World Service, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/index.shtml>

CNN, www.cnn.com

Fox News, www.foxnews.com

ABYZ News Links, <http://www.abyznewslinks.com/>

Sites on Doing Web Research:

Bare Bones 101, <http://www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/pages/bones/bones.shtml>

Evaluating Internet Information, <http://www.library.jhu.edu/researchhelp/general/evaluating/>

Evaluating Web Pages, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>

Information Literacy: Search Strategies,

<http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/5locate/adviceengine.html>

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators, <http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/index.html>

Other Resources:

Diana Hacker's Research and Documentation Online, <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

"MLA Formatting and Style Guide," Purdue University

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>

"Citing Sources," Duke University Libraries, <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/>

"How to Read in College," Professor Timothy Burke, Swarthmore College,

http://weblogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/?page_id=84

"How to Skim," Professor Craig McDaniel, University of Denver,

<http://moderforcaleb.blogspot.com/2005/10/how-to-skim.html>

Ask your school librarian/media specialist about the availability of such academic resources as JSTOR and WorldCat; also inquire about availability of interlibrary loan.

Names:

INTERNET SCAVENGER HUNT

Teacher: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Topic: _____

1. Use a search engine like Google (<http://www.google.com/>) to find a site with information on your topic. Record basic information about the site:

Title:

URL:

Who created the site:

Date last updated:

Describe your search strategy:

2. Use the same search engine to find another site with information on your topic, but ***use a different search strategy***. Record basic information about the site:

Title:

URL:

Who created the site:

Date last updated:

Describe your search strategy:

3. Use a subject directory like Yahoo! Directory (<http://dir.yahoo.com/>) to find a third site with information on your topic. Record basic information about the site:

Title:

URL:

Who created the site:

Date last updated:

Describe the path you followed in the directory to find this site.

4. Use a newspaper or television network site to find information about your topic.

Title of Site:

URL:

Title of article or story:

Reporter who prepared the article or story:

Date of article:

Describe how you found this article on the news site.

5. Use a strategy you have not yet used to find a site with information on your topic. Record basic information on the site:

Title:

URL:

Who created the site:

Date last updated:

Describe how you found this site.

Names:

PROJECT RESEARCH WORKSHEET

Teacher: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Topic: _____

1. **Resources:** Using the internet, library, or any other available sources, find **two journal articles or books** and **three websites** that provide detailed information about your topic. *At least one of the websites must present an opposing viewpoint.* Fill in the following information and then complete a **Bias and Authenticity Worksheet** for each resource you find in order to determine bias and authenticity. **Remember:** Research is never really done—there is always more to learn about a topic. You should keep adding sources and information and refining your thinking throughout the course of this project.

Book/Journal Article Title: _____

Author: _____ Publisher: _____ ©Date: _____

Summary and new info you learned:

How does this site help you understand your issue and support or challenge?

Book/Journal Article title: _____

Author: _____ Publisher: _____ ©Date: _____

Summary and new info you learned:

How does this site help you understand your issue?

Website Title: _____ URL: _____

Author: _____ Site Owner: _____ ©Date: _____

Summary and new info you learned:

How does this site help you understand your issue?

Website Title: _____ URL: _____
Author: _____ Site Owner: _____ ©Date: _____
Summary and new info you learned:

How does this site help you understand your issue?

Website Title: _____ URL: _____
Author: _____ Site Owner: _____ ©Date: _____
Summary and new info you learned:

How does this site help you understand your issue?

- 2. Details:** Use your new-found knowledge to map out the details of your issue. First, identify the three most important positions or perspectives concerning your topic:

Position: _____

Supporters: _____

Evidence they use to support their claims:

a.

b.

c.

Position: _____

Supporters: _____

Evidence they use to support their claims:

a.

b.

c.

Names:

BIAS AND AUTHENTICITY WORKSHEET

Teacher: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Topic: _____

An important step in all research is evaluating sources. Evaluating sources involves asking such questions as: What useful information or perspectives does the source provide? Is the information accurate? Is evidence provided to support the perspectives taken? Who is the author? What are his/her biases?

Evaluating your sources is even more critical in using the internet. The internet is a low-cost way that virtually anyone can enter the “marketplace of ideas.” It makes a wide range of information and perspectives available. However, because web sites are not always peer-reviewed or edited, a lot of misinformation has been published on the web, and opinion often masquerades as fact.

The following are questions that will help you evaluate the authenticity and bias of websites.

Author

1. Who is the author of the information?
2. What are the author’s credentials?
3. Is the author well-respected in the field?
4. What is the author’s stake in the issue?
5. Is contact information for the author provided?

Publisher

1. Who published the page? (You should be able to tell either from the URL or from “About Us” or similar information on the page.)
2. What does the domain type (org, gov, com, edu) tell you about the publisher? Is it an appropriate body to publish on this topic/issue?
3. Is the organization well-regarded in the field?
4. What is the organization’s stake in the issue?
5. Is information on the organization’s views provided?

6. What products are advertised on the site? What does this tell you about the publisher?
7. Is contact information provided for the organization?
8. What other sites link to this site? (Many search engines allow you to check this. In the Search box, fill in “link: URL”)

Content Analysis

1. Does the author provide documentation for information or perspectives provided? Is a bibliography provided?
2. Does the content discuss well-established ideas or information about the issue that you have encountered in other sources?
3. Does the author provide reasoned arguments supporting his/her positions?
4. Does the author acknowledge controversy exists about this issue? Does he/she mention opposing views?
5. Is the information current?
6. Can you verify the information provided?
7. Does the site link to other useful sources?
8. Are you sure that the site is not intended to be ironic, satiric, or a parody? (This may sound silly, but people are often fooled by sites that are intended to be humorous.)

Checking for Bias

1. Does the site use language designed to elicit emotional responses?
2. Does the author exaggerate points to support his/her view?
3. Does the author overgeneralize? For example, does he/she make “all” or “nothing” statements?
4. Can you find evidence of prejudice in the site?
5. Are opinions stated as facts?
6. Are opposing viewpoints acknowledged?