

Glendale College Library Information Competencies Workshops

Evaluation of Academic Research on the Web – Outline

Core Competencies:

- Develop and implement an effective search strategy appropriate for an information need by:
 - Differentiating various types of information sources (specialized encyclopedias, article databases, library catalogs, search engines, etc.) and the purpose of each.
 - Choosing and accessing appropriate information sources for the research question.
 - Identifying search terms appropriate to the research tool and the topic.
 - Locate and retrieve information by:
 - Using the library's print and online resources effectively.
 - Evaluate information by:
 - Distinguishing reliable from unreliable sources of information, scholarly and popular sources, substantiated facts and point of view.
 - Assessing the authority, accuracy, relevance, reliability, completeness, and timeliness of information.
 - Assess the research strategy by:
 - Determining whether the information retrieved is relevant and sufficient for the project.
 - Analyzing successes and failures, revising research topics, and trying different techniques and research tools as needed.
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Preparation: Distribute the Exercises to students (on front and back of one page).

NOTE: Do not give workshop handout to students until after the first exercise and discussion of criteria for evaluating web information.

Begin the workshop with a problem-based activity that will encourage students to think about how they search the Internet for academic purposes and how they evaluate the information they find.

Tell students that their participation in the workshop is part of what determines their "credit" for attendance at the workshop. The exercises will be collected at the end of the workshop.

- 1. Exercise I (10 minutes):** Explain Exercise I to students. Give them time to formulate a search, find a web site and write down their answers. Remind them to take some time to read and explore their chosen site in order to evaluate it and give a thoughtful answer to numbers 9 and 10. Walk around and consult with students as they complete the exercise. Make sure they understand the instructions and are engaging in the work.
- 2. Review and Comment on Exercise I (30 minutes):** This is where **discussion** comes in. Take the questions from Exercise I (3,4,5,8,9,10) and ask a few students give their answers. As they do this you can then comment on that part of the process. Encourage other students to comment as well; it's a good way to generate discussion amongst peers. This way higher level students won't feel "bored" and can contribute to peer learning.

EXAMPLES:

What search engine did you use? Encourage students to use more than just Google or Yahoo. Introduce them to your favorite news source, Google Scholar (if you like), or a few of the subject directories that tend to give more "academic" results (e.g. Infomine, Librarians' Internet Index, etc.). The point is to choose an appropriate search tool that matches the kind of information you are looking for.

Write your search statement here. and How many results did your search retrieve? Take this opportunity to constructively comment on students' search strategy and terminology. This is a good place to show how advanced search forms help to incorporate Boolean operators, domain searching, phrase searching, etc. and target searches for better, more specific results.

What is the title of the web site you have chosen? and **What are the features that make it a good, reliable and credible source for your paper?** As students present their answers to these questions, try to get them to articulate their criteria for evaluation; reiterate the ones they come up with, and point out the ones they might miss or are unable to articulate:

Authority/credibility

Currency/timeliness

Audience/coverage/purpose

Bias/objectivity

Accuracy/reliability

and my personal favorite . . .

Cumulative knowledge – This is for me the most important “critical” evaluative criterion. It’s also the most difficult. How does the source compare with what you already know?

The more you read, hear, see, experience; the better you will be able to evaluate new information sources. Why do you think your instructors want you to have multiple sources of information?

A quick analogy: If you were planning to buy a new car, would you only listen to what a salesman has to say about the car? Would you only read the manufacturer’s marketing literature? Most of us would also go to trusted sources of information we believe to be impartial, e.g. *Consumer Reports, Motor Trend, Car & Driver, etc.*

How do you think the information in this source will help to answer your research question?

This is the big question about relevance and appropriateness, which I find is a major stumbling block for many students. This is a good place to have a brief discussion of Wikipedia. As a few students present their answers to this question, you can make some of these points:

- The importance of having a well-defined and focused question you are trying to answer
- The importance of applying the critical evaluation criteria
- Thinking about what new information or new perspective this source provides
- Is this the kind/type of information you need? Is it academic enough?

3. **Exercise II (10 minutes)** Explain Exercise II to students. Even if they found good information sources with their first search, insist that they try something different this time. Point out that they might find something better with new terms that they discovered in the process of doing the first search, and/or a different search engine; they might learn some new terms associated with their topic that will help them further focus their research topic. Once again, move around the room as they work through the exercise encouraging them to step out of their comfort zones and try something new (e.g. phrase searching, domain searching, more specific terms, etc.).

4. **Review discuss and comment on Exercise II** (10 minutes)

5. **PLEASE remember to collect all the exercises from students before they leave. We will be using them to assess student learning outcomes. Leave them in the folder along with your workshop roster. THANKS!**