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# Information Literacy in the Digital Age Lesson Plan

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# Information Literacy in the Digital Age Lesson Plan

## Lesson Goals

1. To make students think evaluate the various ways they receive information during their daily lives.
2. Help students understand the strengths and weaknesses of various information sources.
3. To provide an example that highlights the need to critically evaluate the information we receive.

## Part One- In-Class Small Group Activity

I will begin by having students answer the questions 1-4 on their own. Next, I will have them form into small groups of 3-4 students, and will give them a marker and a large piece of poster paper to keep notes as they discuss their answers. Once groups have completed questions 1-4, I will introduce questions 5-7 for them to discuss. Groups will be asked to present their answers to the class.

1. Information comes in many different forms. Please brainstorm a list of the different types of information you might use in your daily lives.
2. Information also comes from many different sources. Please brainstorm a list of all the information sources that you use.
3. Which source(s) is the most common way for you to hear various piece of information for the first time? In other words, which source(s) is the way that “breaking news” regarding topics tends to reach you?
4. Let’s pretend I have given you an assignment that involves writing a paper about long-distance romantic relationships. How would you go about researching this topic? Please list which sources/search engines you would use, and in which order you would use them. Please be as specific and honest as possible, as there are no right or wrong answers here.
5. Now that you have a list of information sources, please attempt to think objectively by ranking these sources from the “Best” source, to the “Worst” source for information.
6. What criteria did you use to determine whether an information source was good or bad? Did you have any disagreements in your group regarding where to place a particular source?
7. Were there any interesting observations between your objective list of “Best” sources, and

the way that you actually search for information?

**Debriefing:** I will debrief with a lecture and discussion regarding the relative strengths and weaknesses of different information sources. For example, peer-reviewed journals are the gold standard for academic validity, yet the peer-review process is incredibly slow which can hinder our ability to receive up-to-date information. Conversely, news articles are published incredibly quickly, yet might contain more informational errors. Likewise, user-generated websites like blogs, wikis, and social networks have the power of numbers and speed, yet are risky because many individuals comment on subjects they do not fully understand themselves. I will use the example of Obama's "You didn't build that" speech to help students understand how information can be spread (and misunderstood) when it is stripped of its original context and spread across the web. I will show the original speech, and then show students some of the various ways the speech was cut/edited as this meme spread through the Internet (see videos on <http://factcheck.org/2012/07/you-didnt-build-that-uncut-and-unedited/> and Facebook photos from <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/you-didnt-build-that>). This will lend itself to a discussion of primary and secondary sources. I will also use one of my own publications as an example of how research results can be misrepresented in popular press coverage. One of my research articles regarding Facebook friendship recently attracted international coverage and syndication via Yahoo News and other outlets, however one of the authors who picked up our story really butchered the results during the process. This example should stress the importance of locating primary sources whenever possible. Finally, I will show a 14-minute video of a speech that researcher Danah Boyd gave at a Gov2.0 Expo (See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nNgXBIMass>), which stresses the importance of critically evaluating the data that we receive. In this speech, Dr. Boyd explains that information is becoming increasingly transparent; however, many individual do not possess the necessary skills to evaluate the information and therefore accept it at face value. Dr. Boyd also offers a call to action by urging the most education and information literate individuals in our society (i.e., all of us and our students) to consider the ethical implications of our position of privilege. I will end by providing students with the following take-home assignment, which will be returned for grading the following day.

## **Part Two- Take Home Assignment**

After our in class activity, students will be asked to complete the following assignment at home.

Please select an information source/website that you use frequently. You can select any form of source/website you wish (except face-to-face communication), as long as it is a place that you receive a lot of information. Please answer the following questions about your source/website. You can use that source/website and any other information sources in order to determine your answers to these questions. Note: In some cases you might not be able to find answers to all questions. This is okay, but is something that you should note and consider in your answer.

1. What is the purpose of your source/website? What information does it share? Why/when would a person choose to visit this source/website? What type of audience does the source

cater toward?

2. Who created your source/website? Does your source/website have an author? Is there an editor who holds the author responsible for what they write? What are the qualifications and credentials of the author and editor?
3. Is your source/website part of a larger corporation? Is your source non-profit, or does it have a profit motive? Do you think the presence or absence of corporate agendas and profit affects the content of your source/website?
4. Is the information presented from a biased point of view? How can you tell? What type of language does the source/website use (scholarly, informal, inflammatory, etc.)? What audience does it seem to cater toward?
5. What are the strengths of this source/website? What are its weaknesses?
6. Would you choose to use this source/website in a research paper? Why or why not? Would you trust the information in this source for your everyday information needs? Why/why not?