



INSTRUCT TEACHING GUIDE

8. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE

If you are teaching the value of evidence and the importance of critically assessing a source, refer to:

- Types of Resources
- Assumption and Bias
- Purpose and Value of Evidence

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Bias

Bias in others and personal bias both play key roles in the quality of a source. Use this discussion to get your students thinking about biases they may encounter in sources as well as their own unconscious preconceptions. Begin by asking students to define bias, using an example from their own experience. Follow up by asking how these preconceived notions affected the outcome of the situation.

Additionally, you may ask your students to describe how they keep up with current events. Is there a particular source they trust for news? What makes a source trustworthy? Use this topic to help students dig deeper into topics like objective reporting.

Characteristics of Quality Sources

During the research process, students will need to be able to assess the quality of sources on their own. Start by asking your students to brainstorm the characteristics of a reliable, high-quality source. This can be done in pairs or as a class. Next, facilitate the synthesis of the students' responses to come up with a concise definition of a high-quality source.

This discussion can be used as an introduction to evaluation criteria related to evidence and logical arguments.

ACTIVITIES

Identifying Resources

Help your students get started with a research assignment in this database selection exercise. Using an upcoming assignment, introduce students to their research purpose and the tools available to them through the library and online. Ask students to write down their research purpose and brainstorm the types of information they will need to begin their research. Next, students should create a list of their in-depth research needs.

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Using the library's list of databases, ask students to identify at least 3 databases they will use to gather background information about their topic. Additionally, students will select at least 1 database that likely will meet their in-depth research needs. Students also should be able to describe why each resource would be most appropriate during a particular stage of their research.

News Sources

Challenge assumptions about bias by asking your students to locate conscious and unconscious bias in a reputable news source. Divide students into groups and assign each a news site or organization to research. Students should use at least 2 examples from the source to explain to the class how bias affects the presentation of facts. Examples of explicit and implicit bias present in news items may include positive or negative comments made by journalists based on their personal opinions about an issue, or sports coverage consistently dominated by male reporters.

Identifying Bias

In order to be successful in their academic careers, students must be able to evaluate sources for accuracy and objectivity. For this activity, provide students with 1 or 2 resources that demonstrate bias. Ask students to read the article or report once to get familiar with the topic and main argument. Next, students should reread the article or report, using these prompts to identify bias:

- What are the author's credentials?
- Does the author use personal experience or opinion as the basis for their main argument?
- Are both sides of the issue represented fairly?
- When providing supporting evidence, does the author favor certain authors and sources more than others?

Evidence

Use this activity to demonstrate the importance of evidence in scholarship. Students will locate a scientific report on their topic of interest to analyze the use of evidence. After taking notes on the article, your students should be able to discuss how the author(s) used evidence to support their findings. You also may ask students to identify if and how the report uses evidence to confirm or refute opposing theories.

Next, have your students research and select an article from a non-scientific source. They should be able to identify and discuss how the author(s) of the source used evidence to support the main argument and arrive at a logical conclusion.

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