



## VIEW TEACHING GUIDES

### 3. EVALUATING SOURCES AND UNDERSTANDING EVIDENCE

To provide your students with a broad overview of the principles of evaluating sources, identifying bias and misinformation, refer to the following materials:

- Evaluating Sources
- How to Identify and Debunk Fake News
- What is Authority?
- Introduction to Bias
- Types of Bias
- Purpose and Value of Evidence

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

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### **Evaluating Information**

Begin a real-world conversation about evaluation. Examples may include medical topics, large purchases, news sources, social media, mockumentaries, gossip, etc. Ask students how they would go about evaluating information they find on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media platforms. Have students ever encountered a documentary or mockumentary? How did they tell the difference? Do students question news sources? Do they look at multiple sources of information when encountering a news story that catches their interests? Investigate those sources for motives or bias before accepting their version?

### **The Importance of Using Scholarly Sources**

Why do scholarly sources matter? When and why are they more useful than non-scholarly information?

### **Evaluation Criteria**

#### ***Authority***

Discuss what authority means. Why do credentials or academic/research associations matter? What about the author's background and/or publication history? Does the publisher matter? Why or why not? This might be a good place to take a look at predatory publishers.

#### ***Accuracy***

Can the information be verified via cited sources? Does it agree with other sources? If not, do students conduct more research? Has information about methodology been included? How much time do students put into determining accuracy? Are there time constraints? Are there shortcuts?

#### ***Currency***

Is currency important for your subject or topic? Can you determine when the information was produced or published? If the information is outdated, but otherwise applicable to your project, look for more recent work from the same author. Does the information need to be examined from a historical or cultural perspective?

**Relevance**

Is the scope appropriate for your topic? What is the focus? What information is included and/or excluded? If it describes research, is there information about the sample used in the research? Is the sample representative of the population?

**Objectivity**

What is the purpose of the work? Does the work offer facts, opinions, or a combination? What is the tone of the work? What assumptions does it make?

**Audience**

Is this a scholarly publication? Trade information? General? If it is a web page, is it part of a larger site? Is there an expectation of prior knowledge or assumptions?

**Evaluating Non-Scholarly Sources**

The same principles apply as to scholarly sources, but with less emphasis on scholarly information requirement. For non-scholarly resources, including alternative types of digital media like podcasts or video logs, make sure to understand the motivation of the information provider. Ask questions and verify information across multiple resources.

**Objectivity in Reporting**

Objective vs. persuasive journalism: Opinion and persuasive examples include accounts, columns, commentary, op-eds, and reviews. Look at word choices, tone, and design.

**Website Evaluation**

Discuss the differences among .edu, .com, .gov, .org, etc. Many students take these URL designations for granted and don't understand the importance or usefulness of them.

## ACTIVITIES

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**Evaluating a Source**

Ask students to find 2 unacceptable sources and 1 that is acceptable on a topic relevant to an academic assignment. They should write a paragraph or essay describing the evaluation process, their observations, and decision for each of the 3 sources. If time permits, have students share reasons for finding a site unacceptable for an academic assignment.

**Visual Evaluation**

Pick an article with an image from a local print newspaper or from an online piece of journalism. Give the students 2 to 5 minutes to read the article and ask them to write a 1-minute essay about how the image contributes to the story. Have students share their findings with the class or in small groups.

**Describing a Source**

Either provide a health article citing a study(ies) from a popular news site, such as the BBC or *The New York Times*, or ask students to find one. Direct students to locate the original source of any statistics and identify:

- Who created this information (study authors)
- Where the study originally was published
- The purpose of the study
- The source of the data
- A description of the population
- A description of the sample
- A short definition of the problem
- A short definition of the variables for the statistic reported in the newspaper
- Benchmark variables
- Questions about how the data may be flawed

If time allows, ask the students to find benchmark variables and write an evaluation of the statistic.

**Evaluating News Sources**

Have your students examine the [infographic](#) below and discuss what they see. Discussion questions might include: What do you notice about the funding sources for the new organization described in this infographic? How might revenue sources influence the content of a particular news organization? What, if anything, do you think news organizations can do to minimize bias or influence from funding sources?

Another activity to accompany the infographic would involve asking your students to locate 2 to 3 news reports from the different news organizations on the same topic and compare them, taking into account what they have learned about their funding. Ask them: What, if any, alignment does the angle of the news piece have with a particular point of view? Is the perspective what you expected, given the funding sources? Do you think this source succeeds in being objective? Why or why not?

## FOLLOWING THE \$\$\$ TRAIL: NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, INC.

website:  
**npr.org**

**17**  
FOREIGN  
BUREAUS

Incorporated in  
**1970**  
as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit

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### MISSION STATEMENT

"To work in partnership with Member Stations to create a more informed public — one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and cultures. To accomplish our mission, we produce, acquire, and distribute programming that meets the highest standards of public service in journalism and cultural expression; we represent our members in matters of their mutual interest; and we provide satellite interconnection for the entire public radio system."

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THERE ARE CURRENTLY  
**23** MEMBERS  
ON THE BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS

↓

INCLUDING THE NPR FOUNDATION CHAIR  
AND THE NPR PRESIDENT AND CEO

**12** member station  
managers elected  
by fellow member stations

↓

↓

**9** public directors  
("prominent members of the  
public selected by the Board and  
confirmed by NPR Member stations")

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**MEMBER STATIONS** are independent, and locally-owned/operated

**2/3** of member stations are licensed to, or are affiliated with, colleges or universities

**1/3** "are governed by community-based boards"

Some operate with **public TV stations** and **partner** with NPR to provide news

Stations apply for NPR membership → NPR distributes some programs produced by member stations

Stations receiving Corporation for Public Broadcasting grants must comply with the **Communications Act of 1934**

**MEMBER STATION REVENUE** isn't included in NPR's financial statement

Many receive grants from the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting**, created by Congress in 1967

Member stations pay **annual dues** and pay to broadcast NPR programs

**CURRENT LEADERS**

**Roger LaMay**,  
Chair of NPR Board of Directors  
WKPN General Manager

**Jarl Mohn**,  
NPR President and CEO

**Howard Wollner**,  
Chair of NPR Foundation  
Former Senior Vice President of Starbucks

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### ANNUAL SOURCES OF REVENUE

**39%**

**MEMBERSHIP**

- Dues and fees paid by member stations
- Underwriting—announcements made on air about a business—paid by corporate sponsors

**24%**

**CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP**

- Financial support from companies and organizations
- NPR Journalists don't select corporate sponsors and are held to NPR's ethical standards
- "NPR makes decisions about national corporate sponsors based on principles established by NPR's Board of Directors"

**15%**

**OTHER SOURCES**

- Distribution division that collects "revenue from stations and producers that use its platform for broadcast distribution"
- Income from facility rentals, "NPR-branded consumer products (such as those sold at the NPR Shop), and license fees"

**14%**

**GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

- From institutions and nonprofits
- Funds can support member stations

**8%**

**NPR FOUNDATION**

- "[E]nhances current and long-term financial support for NPR"
- Managed by 60 Board of Trustees members
- Donor Privacy Statement asserts NPR "generally refrains from disclosing information about its donors" though it will disclose "names of its donors above a certain level"

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CREDO  
EDUCATION