

Chapter 2: Finding, Choosing, and Evaluating Sources

Commentary

This chapter will fit well with a unit or discussion about critical thinking.

Requiring students to submit photocopies and printouts of all their sources is an excellent way to determine how effectively they are using sources and to discover whether they are plagiarizing from them. Making the suggestion in 3.1 a requirement, then, will benefit both you and your students.

Review questions

1. See Section 2.3. Sample answer: The Ladder of Generalization is a continuum of words that describes something, ranging from very specific to very general. When a searcher does not locate the desired information because of too few hits, going up the ladder can help. If there are too many hits, going down the ladder can help. Example ladder from very general to more specific: computer part, circuit board component, integrated circuit, surface-mount integrated circuit, surface-mount application specific integrated circuit chip (ASIC). Example ladder from very specific to very general: ten-question single-response multiple-choice online opinion survey, multiple-choice online opinion survey, opinion survey, survey.
2. See Section 2.2. Sample answer: In addition to facts, valuable information includes interpretations, professional judgments, reasoned arguments, creative ideas, personal examples, accounts of events, experiments, and philosophical commentary.
3. See Section 2.2. Sample answer: A primary source is an original source of information such as a diary, a historical document, or literary work. A secondary source provides an interpretation or commentary on one or more primary sources. Encyclopedia articles and general histories are examples of secondary sources.
4. See Section 2.2. Sample answer: Dictionary definitions are not only often unhelpful, but they also imply that the writer does not know how to start a paper or continue a thought. Quoting dictionary definitions often appears high schoolish.
5. See Section 2.4. Sample answer: Look for organizational sites (institutes, foundations), find pages on sites that appear reputable (such as a university or government site), find articles from printed sources (using FindArticles.com, for example).
6. See Section 2.5. Sample answer: It is important to use sources that are authoritative, accurate, and reliable so that they will lend credibility to the argument in the paper.

Questions for thought and discussion

Answers will vary. Questions 3 and 4 attempt to stimulate thinking about information quality as a means of helping students realize that information varies widely in value: credibility, accuracy, etc. Discussions about bias will also be valuable (Question 5). Too many students appear to view all information as similar in quality and accept whatever sources they first discover. Giving them some examples of very poor sources might be useful. The tabloids often have bizarre stories connected with dramatic news events, as well as simply unbelievable stories.

Chapter 2 Review: True-false quiz

1. False. (Remind students of the tabloids if they get this one wrong.)
2. True. In fact, it's a good idea to respond to sources that disagree with your own conclusions.
3. False. The deep or invisible Web contains many databases not indexed by search engines.
4. False. Reference librarians can help you focus your topic and direct your research.
5. True.
6. True. Media (TV, magazines) interested in ratings or circulation sometimes compromise accuracy in order to make the information more fun or exciting. (Mention concepts such as infotainment, factoids, and even urban legends.)
7. False. Those who quote dictionaries gain little respect.
8. True. Part of the accuracy test is timeliness. Knowing when a Web article was written is often important.

- 9.** False. First, your instructor is an audience, who must be considered. Second, your peers are likely to be involved in reading and sharing. Third, you should perform an audience analysis for the sake of practice. Research papers usually assume a wide audience.
- 10.** True. Any source of reliable information can be used in a research paper.