

targeted
 adaptable

 Primary
 Intermediate
 Middle
 Senior
Discuss author and authority

Assessing website credibility

judging the authority and credibility of information posted on the Internet

Learning outcomes

- assess the credibility of a website, based on specific criteria
- understand the value of comparing websites to ensure credibility and discover the best sources of information

Learn about the strategy

- Introduce the concepts of author and authority and pose the questions for discussion.
- Following the discussion, record student-student responses to the last question under the heading *Criteria for credible authorities* and leave visible for the second activity.

Student activity

Discuss the following questions.

- ✓ What does it mean to say that someone is an author?
- ✓ What does it mean to say that someone is an authority on a topic?
- ✓ Are all authors authorities on their topic? Why or why not?
- ✓ Under what conditions would an author be an authority?

Share your discussion ideas with the class.

Possible responses

- ✓ *author is someone who writes something like a poem, essay, novel, blog, twitter post, Facebook page*
- ✓ *author creates, writes, describes*
- ✓ *author can write fiction (not real / not true) or nonfiction (real / true)*
- ✓ *authority is an accepted source of information*
- ✓ *authority is an expert on a subject, nonfiction material*
- ✓ *not all authors are authorities as could be writing creatively or are not writing to inform*
- ✓ *anyone can write (be an author, though not necessarily a good one), but an authority needs to be quite informed on a topic*
- ✓ *authors may be authorities when they are experts on a particular subject and choose to write about it*

Opportunities for differentiation

- ✓ Provide students with examples of authors and authorities.

Rate website authorities

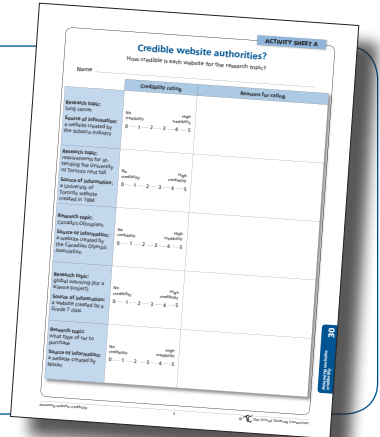
- Explain that not all websites are equal and students must look carefully at each to ensure that the website creators are “authorities” on the subject they are discussing. Suggest that the criteria for credible authorities could be extended and applied to assessing website credibility.
- Distribute *Credible website authorities?* (Activity Sheet A) and invite students to discuss and rate the credibility of each website information source based on the criteria for credible authorities.

Student activity

Based on the criteria for credible authorities developed by the class, rate the credibility of the source of information for each website provided.

Possible reasons for rating

- ✓ *bias – the author has something to gain*
- ✓ *experience / age of the author*
- ✓ *reputation of the author*
- ✓ *currency of the information source*



Develop criteria for website credibility

- Add newly suggested criteria to *Criteria for credible authorities*. Suggest that authorship is only one dimension of assessing website credibility. Change the title of the list to *Criteria for a credible website*.
- Following the brainstorming activity, guide students in grouping the criteria and identifying the most important.

Student activity

In a group, brainstorm elements that make a website credible.

Collaboratively identify the five most important criteria.

Possible criteria

- ✓ *authorship*
- ✓ *sponsorship*
- ✓ *sources of ideas / information*
- ✓ *indicators of care*

Possible responses

- ✓ *site has title, author / organization, date*
- ✓ *URL (link address) has edu in it, so it belongs to an educational community*
- ✓ *site has been positively reviewed by others*
- ✓ *website seems professional in layout and is well crafted (no technical mistakes like spelling, grammar, punctuation)*
- ✓ *content appears balanced (not one-sided); no obvious “vested interest” by a certain person, group, or organization that would create bias*
- ✓ *information appears appropriate and accurate*
- ✓ *content appears up-to-date (website has been recently updated)*
- ✓ *website suits audience (your) purpose (not too simple, not too complex)*

Opportunities for differentiation

- ✓ Provide criteria and invite students to rank order, or select the five most important.

Practise the strategy

Review a website

- Select an appropriate website for students to examine. Review the criteria for a credible website. Using the *Assessing website credibility data chart* (Activity Sheet B), work collaboratively with students to assess the credibility of the website. Encourage students to identify positive and negative features.

Student activity

Go to the suggested website.

In your group, discuss where to look for evidence related to each criterion.

Collaboratively identify evidence that supports or rejects each criterion on the data chart.

Discuss the difference between a feature and the implications of that feature.

Possible responses

Where to look

- ✓ URL (check the domain name, check for a tilde symbol, ~)
- ✓ resources / references at the end of the article
- ✓ author (at the beginning or end of the article)
- ✓ contact information
- ✓ content (fact or opinion, purpose, bias)
- ✓ logos, symbols
- ✓ titles
- ✓ pictures / images
- ✓ reviews (balance, bias)
- ✓ pose (not too simple, not too complex)

Assessment for learning

- ✓ Ensure that students know where to look for evidence about website credibility.
- ✓ Introduce the *Assessing website credibility rating scale* (Activity Sheet E). Use the example students completed collaboratively to brainstorm descriptors for “excellent” assessment of website credibility, using each criterion.

Compare websites

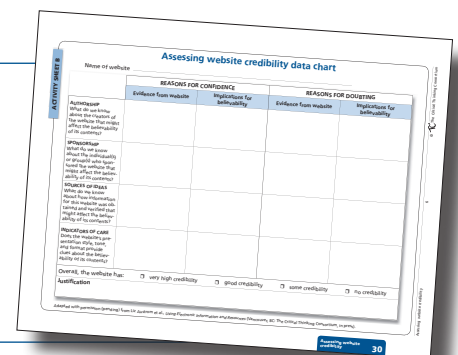
- Assign pairs of websites, from the sites provided on *Website pairs* (Activity Sheet C), to student partners. Provide no clues (including title, as that might influence students) as to which sites are reliable or unreliable.

Student activity

Go to the two websites you have been assigned.

Rate the credibility of each website, using the *Assessing website credibility data chart* (Activity Sheet B).

Share your findings with the class.



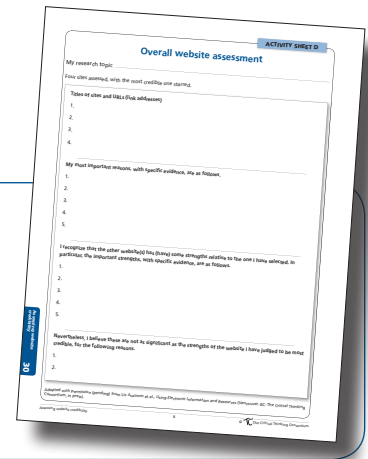
Assessment for learning

- ✓ Encourage students to use the *Assessing website credibility rating scale* (Activity Sheet E) to self- and peer-assess their analysis of the website’s credibility.

Use the strategy on your own

Find the best website:
extension activity

- Discuss with students the importance of website credibility. Suggest that an important task in researching any topic is to select the most credible websites as sources of information.



Student activity

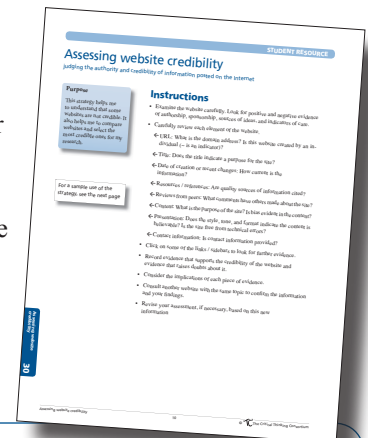
Find four relevant websites as sources for a research topic of your choice.

Gather evidence and assess the credibility of each site, using the criteria for a credible website.

Identify the most credible website and justify your decision, using *Overall website assessment* (Activity Sheet D).

Review the strategy

- Explain to students that assessing website credibility is not only useful for research in all the disciplines, but also when “surfing the web” outside of school. Point out that this strategy determines the credibility of the website, but further examination may be required to decide whether or not the site is useful. Provide students with a copy of the *Student Resource*. Suggest that this resource will help them apply the strategy on their own.



Student activity

Explain to a partner the purpose of assessing website credibility.

Brainstorm the steps in assessing website credibility. Compare your suggestions to those in the *Student Resource*.

Discuss possible ways to use the *Assessing website credibility* strategy both in and out of school.

Possible responses

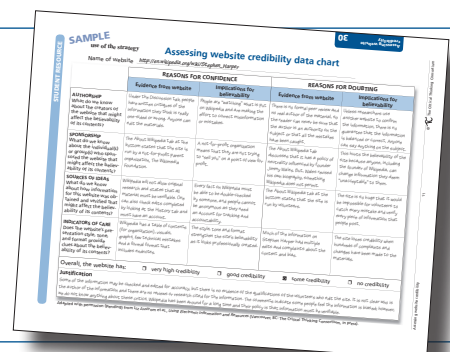
- ✓ better to judge an author and whether he or she is an authority on a topic and not taking things at face value
- ✓ become a critical thinker who looks at a website's source (author, structure, purpose, up-to-date information, bias) carefully before using it for research or surfing the web at home
- ✓ understand that every site has an author but not every site is an authority on a subject

Assess the sample

- Review the sample use of the strategy found in the *Student Resource*. Invite students to use the rubric to assess the sample.

Student activity

Use the *Assessing website credibility data chart* or the rating scale to assess the sample use of the strategy.



Assessing website credibility data chart

Name of website _____

	REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE		REASONS FOR DOUBTING	
	Evidence from website	Implications for believability	Evidence from website	Implications for believability
AUTHORSHIP What do we know about the creators of the website that might affect the believability of its contents?				
SPONSORSHIP What do we know about the individual(s) or group(s) who sponsored the website that might affect the believability of its contents?				
SOURCES OF IDEAS What do we know about how information for this website was obtained and verified that might affect the believability of its contents?				
INDICATORS OF CARE Does the website's presentation style, tone, and format provide clues about the believability of its contents?				
Overall, the website has:	<input type="checkbox"/> very high credibility <input type="checkbox"/> good credibility <input type="checkbox"/> some credibility <input type="checkbox"/> no credibility			
Justification				

Website pairs

Choose pairs of sites for students to explore. Do not include category titles as students should not know in advance which sites are reliable and which are not.

Unreliable sites

California's Velcro Crop Under Challenge

<http://www.umbachconsulting.com/miscellany/velcro.html>

Experience the Newest Form of Water!

<http://www.buydehydratedwater.com/home.html>

Feline Reactions to Bearded Men

<http://www.sree.net/stories/feline.html>

Mankato, MN Home Page

<http://city-mankato.us>

Republic of Molossia

<http://www.molossia.org>

The Jackalope Conspiracy

<http://www.sudftw.com/jackcon.htm>

Reliable sites

Welcome to the Velcro Companies

<http://www.velcro.com>

Inter-Agency Connections for
Freshwater Management

<http://www.unwater.org>

Behavior Problems in Cats

<http://www.peteducation.com/category.cfm?c=1+1310>

Elephant Butte

<http://cityofelephantbutte.com>

Welcome to Digital Liechtenstein

<http://www.liechtenstein.li/en/>

Endangered Species

<http://www.worldwildlife.org/endangered>

Overall website assessment

My research topic _____

Four sites assessed, with the most credible one starred.

Titles of sites and URLs (link addresses)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

My most important reasons, with specific evidence, are as follows.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

I recognize that the other website(s) has (have) some strengths relative to the one I have selected. In particular, the important strengths, with specific evidence, are as follows.

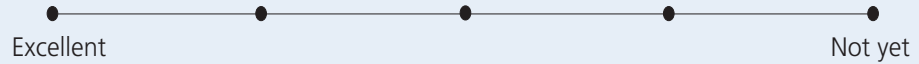
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Nevertheless, I believe these are not as significant as the strengths of the website I have judged to be most credible, for the following reasons.

- 1.
- 2.

Assessing website credibility rating scale

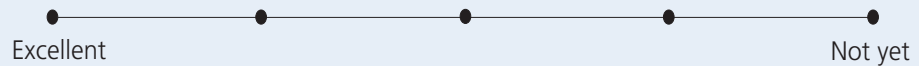
I identify relevant evidence.



"Look fors" (describe excellent):

Evidence for rating:

I identify positive and negative features.



"Look fors" (describe excellent):

Evidence for rating:

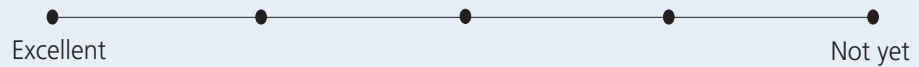
I offer plausible implications.



"Look fors" (describe excellent):

Evidence for rating:

I justify my rating.



"Look fors" (describe excellent):

Evidence for rating:

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Purpose

This strategy helps me to understand that some websites are not credible. It also helps me to compare websites and select the most credible ones for my research.

For a sample use of the strategy, see the next page.

Instructions

- Examine the website carefully. Look for positive and negative evidence of authorship, sponsorship, sources of ideas, and indicators of care.
- Carefully review each element of the website.
 - ← URL: What is the domain address? Is this website created by an individual (~ is an indicator)?
 - ← Title: Does the title indicate a purpose for the site?
 - ← Date of creation or recent changes: How current is the information?
 - ← Resources / references: Are quality sources of information cited?
 - ← Reviews from peers: What comments have others made about the site?
 - ← Content: What is the purpose of the site? Is bias evident in the content?
 - ← Presentation: Does the style, tone, and format indicate the content is believable? Is the site free from technical errors?
 - ← Contact information: Is contact information provided?
- Click on some of the links / sidebars to look for further evidence.
- Record evidence that supports the credibility of the website and evidence that raises doubts about it.
- Consider the implications of each piece of evidence.
- Consult another website with the same topic to confirm the information and your findings.
- Revise your assessment, if necessary, based on this new information

SAMPLE

use of the strategy

Assessing website credibility data chart

Name of website

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Harper**03**Assessing website
credibility

	REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE		REASONS FOR DOUBTING	
	Evidence from website	Implications for believability	Evidence from website	Implications for believability
AUTHORSHIP What do we know about the creators of the website that might affect the believability of its contents?	Under the Talk tab, people have written critiques of the information they think is really one-sided or wrong. Anyone can edit the materials.	People are “watching” what is put on Wikipedia and are making the effort to correct misinformation or mistakes.	There is no formal peer review and no real author of the material, so the reader can never be sure that the author is an authority on the subject or that all the mistakes have been caught.	Unless researchers use another website to confirm the information, there is no guarantee that the information is balanced or correct. Anyone can say anything on the subject.
SPONSORSHIP What do we know about the individual(s) or group(s) who sponsored the website that might affect the believability of its contents?	The About Wikipedia link at the bottom states that the site is run by a not-for-profit parent organization, The Wikimedia Foundation.	A not-for-profit organization means that they are not trying to “sell you” on a point of view for profit.	The About Wikipedia link discusses that it has a policy of neutrality influenced by founder Jimmy Wales. But Wales revised his own biography, something Wikipedia does not permit.	This hurts the believability of the site because anyone, including the founder of Wikipedia, can change information they deem “unacceptable” to them.
SOURCES OF IDEAS What do we know about how information for this website was obtained and verified that might affect the believability of its contents?	Wikipedia will not allow original research and states that all material must be verifiable. One can also check edits completed by looking at the History tab and must have an account.	Every fact on Wikipedia must be able to be double-checked by someone, and people cannot be anonymous as they need an account for tracking and accountability.	The About Wikipedia link at the bottom states that the site is run by volunteers.	The site is so huge that it would be impossible for volunteers to catch every mistake and verify every piece of information that people post.
INDICATORS OF CARE Does the website’s presentation style, tone, and format provide clues about the believability of its contents?	Wikipedia has a table of contents (for organization), visuals, graphs, few technical mistakes and a formal format that includes endnotes.	The style, tone and format strengthen the site’s believability as it looks professionally created.	Much of the information on Stephen Harper had multiple edits and complaints about the content and bias.	The site loses credibility when hundreds of complaints and changes have been made to the materials.
Overall, the website has:	<input type="checkbox"/> very high credibility	<input type="checkbox"/> good credibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> some credibility	<input type="checkbox"/> no credibility
Justification	Some of the information may be checked and edited for accuracy, but there is no evidence of the qualifications of the volunteers who edit the site. It is not clear who is the author of the information and there are no reviews or research cited for the information. The comments indicate some people feel the information is biased; however, we do not know anything about these critics. Wikipedia has been around for a long time and their policy is that information must be verifiable.			

Assess website credibility

Excellent

Very good

Competent

Basic

Not yet able

I identify accurate, relevant, and comprehensive evidence

I find details that are accurate, clearly relevant, and thoroughly address each criterion. I include many details that are not obvious.

I find details that are accurate, relevant, and address each criterion. I include some details that are not obvious.

I find several obvious details that are largely accurate, generally relevant, and address each criterion.

I find a few obvious details that are often accurate and relevant, and address some of the criteria.

Evidence

I identify positive and negative evidence

I identify many features that both support and question the website's credibility to offer a balanced assessment.

I identify some features that both support and question the website's credibility to offer a balanced assessment.

I identify a few features that support and question the website's credibility to offer a somewhat balanced assessment.

I tend to identify only those features that either support or question the website's credibility.

Evidence

I offer plausible implications

I suggest highly plausible, thoughtful implications for all the evidence.

I suggest plausible, thoughtful implications for all the evidence.

I suggest plausible implications for most of the evidence.

I suggest the most obvious implications for some of the evidence.

Evidence

I offer and justify realistic ratings

The ratings are all very realistic given the evidence, and I offer very thoughtful, insightful, and relevant reasons for the ratings.

The ratings all seem realistic given the evidence, and I offer thoughtful, insightful, and relevant reasons for the ratings.

Most ratings seem realistic given the evidence, and I offer relevant reasons for the ratings.

Some ratings are realistic given the evidence, and I offer only the most obvious reasons for the ratings.

Evidence