

Lesson Plan 18

UW Media Course Final Project: Lateral Reading for any course (adapted from COR curriculum Intro to lateral reading, level 2)

This lesson will introduce students to lateral reading, a strategy for investigating a website or post by going outside the site. Students watch the teacher model the strategy and then have a chance to practice it in order to determine who is behind a website and, ultimately, whether that site is a trustworthy source of information.

Lesson Objective/Student Target:

The students will be able to...

- Define and apply lateral reading
- Lateral reading: the act of reading across multiple sources to verify information
- And answer the question: who is behind the information?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

SSS1.9-12.4

Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

SSS2.9-12.2

Evaluate the validity, reliability, and credibility of sources when researching an issue or event.

SSS2.9-12.3

Determine the kinds of sources and relevant information that are helpful, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses

of the sources.

Health Standard 3:

Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health.

Materials:

● Link to “Article Evaluation” task:

<https://cor.stanford.edu/curriculum/assessments/article-evaluation/>

● Modeling script

● Projector to display computer screen while modeling

● Computers for students (groups may share, if necessary)

● Link to or copies of Guiding Questions for students

Prerequisite Background Knowledge:

Ask students to consider any recent research they had to complete. Have them jot down on a post-it or half-sheet of paper the ways in which they vetted the sources they used for that project – where did they look for information and how did they know it was a “good” source?

Have students take a reliable/not reliable questionnaire about the trustworthiness of different search strategies here.

To fully engage with the examples in this lesson, students need to be familiar with the following topics (based on your students’ background knowledge, you may want to briefly review these at the beginning of the lesson):

● The concept of a minimum wage

● Who tends to support minimum wage increases (workers and liberals) and why

● Who tends to oppose minimum wage increases (businesses and conservatives) and why

Lesson Summary:

1. Students complete task

2. Teacher models lateral reading to evaluate the same website

3. Students practice evaluating another website using lateral

reading

4. Students discuss lateral reading and what they learned as a class

Lesson Plan:

1. Students complete the “Article Evaluation” task. Information about the task, a rubric, and sample student responses are available here:

<https://cor.stanford.edu/curriculum/assessments/article-evaluation/>

a. This task asks students to evaluate an article about the minimum wage and food prices in Denmark that appears on minimumwage.com. Students must determine whether the article is a reliable source of information about the minimum wage. To successfully evaluate the article, students must investigate the sponsor of minimumwage.com by going outside the site itself. However, our experience piloting this task in real classrooms has shown us that many students will not spontaneously do this.

2. Class Vote:

a. After students complete the task, ask them to raise their hands (or use any other mechanism for sharing out) to vote on their conclusions about the site’s reliability. Possible responses include: “Definitely reliable,” “Somewhat reliable,” “Not at all reliable,” and “I’m not sure.”

● You may ask students to share the reasoning behind their evaluations of the website. It’s okay if students share incorrect evaluations or surface misconceptions about online information at this stage. Later, in the next part of the lesson, you will model an effective approach to evaluating the website, so there’s no need to correct students at this point.

3. Modeling:

a. Model an evaluation of the website. A sample script is included at the end of the lesson plan.

b. Note: This will be most effective if you are online and project your computer screen for students to watch you as you model.

4. Debrief Modeling:

a. Ask students:

- What did you notice me doing?
- Why was it important for me to look beyond the “About” page to find out about the organization?
- Why should we adopt a skeptical attitude about what an unknown organization writes on its “About” page?
- How did my evaluation of the article compare to the one you wrote at the beginning of class? What was similar? What was different?
- Why is lateral reading necessary to find out more about the sponsors of a website?

b. Ask students: What information do we need about an organization or author to help us decide if they are trustworthy as sources of information on a particular topic? Help students consider multiple aspects of a source:

- The sponsoring organization or author’s perspective and why they might be motivated to present the information.
- How much expertise or authority they have on the topic and how committed they are to providing trustworthy information. Aspects to consider when deciding whether an organization has authority include:
 1. Whether its authors are trained as journalists (e.g., professional news outlets or fact checking organizations) or have backgrounds in the

specific subjects

they're covering.

2. Whether the organization has processes in place to ensure the information

they produce is factual and trustworthy (like editors, fact checkers, and

review processes like peer review).

3. Whether the organization has systems in place to catch, correct, and admit

mistakes when they are made (like corrections sections).

4. Whether there are obvious conflicts of interest (e.g., a fossil fuel company

providing information that downplays global warming).

5. Guided Practice:

a. Watch Check Yourself with Lateral Reading: John Green's Crash Course Navigating Digital

Information #3 for students (13 min) and answer questions

b. Pass out "Lateral Reading Guiding Questions".

c. Have students work in pairs to evaluate the website

<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/why-we-should-raise-the-minimum-wage> and

answer the guiding questions. Pairs may share a device if necessary.

6. Share Out and Discuss:

a. Pairs of students share what they learned about Odyssey Online as they read laterally.

b. Points to consider about the source:

- Odyssey Online is an online platform that crowdsources articles: writers submit

articles to be published on the site. According to a CNBC article in 2017, Odyssey is

"an expansive platform with 15,000 creators, most of them college students across

US campuses."

- Because Odyssey does not follow standards of more traditional journalism outlets

(e.g., editors, fact checkers, corrections, etc.) and does not

have procedures in place to ensure the quality of its articles, we cannot necessarily trust that this is a reliable source of information on the minimum wage.

● Instead, this article may be seen as a single college student's views on the minimum wage. Students could read the other linked articles and studies to check if those are more reliable sources.

c. Final discussion question: Could you have learned this information about Odyssey Online if you stayed on the site itself?

d. If students do not address it directly, make sure they understand how much information they would have missed had they stayed on the site itself.

e. Remind students why prioritizing the question "Who is behind this information?" is so important and why lateral reading is a powerful method of investigating online sources.

Exit ticket – returning to the entry ticket reliability questionnaire, have students see what answers they would change. Also point out that our district/school online databases are already verified.

Resources:

● Sort Fact from Fiction Online with Lateral Reading – From Stanford History Education Center for teachers

● OER Commons: Lateral Reading II

●

<https://cor.stanford.edu/curriculum/lessons/intro-to-lateral-reading/>

● Check Yourself with Lateral Reading: John Green's Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #3 for students (13 min)

Sample Modeling Script:

Note: This is not intended to be read verbatim. It is an example of how to model lateral reading. We

encourage teachers to use this as a starting place as they prepare to model this skill for their students.

Introduction: Who is behind the information?

- I'm trying to figure out if this article is a reliable source of information on the minimum wage. I'm going to share how I approached this problem. In the process, I will model asking the question, "Who is behind the information?" (Reference the COR classroom poster if you have one). That's the first question I ask when I land on a website I don't know.

- It's tempting to just dive into reading the information. But to quickly evaluate information, we need to make the conscious decision to step back and ask who wrote the words and made the website before we read it. That's the only way to figure out the authors' perspective, how much expertise they have on the minimum wage, and why they're presenting the information—all aspects that go into deciding whether the article is reliable.

- The link in the task brought me to this article. Now, I'm tempted to just start reading it, but I'm going to stop and first try to answer the most pressing question: Who's behind it? Who's saying this? What website am I on?

- It looks like this website is called minimumwage.com. So, I need to find out about the minimumwage.com website. I'd like to know more about the organization behind this, and since that's not really clear from this article page, I'm going to click on the "About" page to see if it will tell me the name of the person or organization who sponsors the website. Then I can investigate them. [Navigate to the "About" page and quickly read it aloud.]

Employment Policies Institute

- The first sentence answers my question about the organization that sponsors this site:

“Minimumwage.com is a project of the Employment Policies Institute.”

- The “About” page makes the organization sound pretty trustworthy: it says it is a non-profit, non-partisan research organization that sponsors research done at universities.

- But one thing I consider when I read an “About” page is that it’s written by the people behind the website itself. There are many reasons to make themselves sound trustworthy—to gain status, followers, donations, etc. Would you say something bad about yourself or your company if you were writing an “About” page? Probably not.

- I know I need to go outside this website to see what other people say about minimumwage.com’s sponsoring organization, the Employment Policies Institute. That’s called lateral reading because I’m going to open a new tab in my browser and search for the name of the organization to see what other sources say about it.

Lateral Reading

- To start my lateral reading, I’m going to open a new tab and search for “Employment Policies Institute.”

- Notice that I put the name of the organization in quotes. I’m doing that so that Google searches for the three words as a unit, rather than finding any of the three words randomly on a web page.

- I’m going to look carefully at the search results before I decide what to click on.

- I’m scrolling past the Employment Policies Institute (EPI) pages because I’m interested in information from other people.

- As I scroll down the page a little further, I see this Salon article: “Corporate America’s new scam: PR firm poses as a think tank.” I’m going to check out this article because it is from Salon, a news

organization I've heard of (and if I want, can check it out on Wikipedia), and the headline makes it sound like the article may give me important information about who's behind this organization.

- Quickly read or skim the first two paragraphs of the article. Focus on the following sentences, starting in the third paragraph: "In an Op-Ed he wrote for the Washington Post, his title was listed as EPI's 'research director' but with a notation that EPI 'receives funding from restaurants, among other sources.' But even this partial disclosure provides a disservice to readers in the nation's capital. In fact, the Employment Policies Institute operates from the same office suite as Berman and Co., a public relations firm owned by Richard Berman."

- This makes me question whether I can trust EPI or minimumwage.com as a neutral or completely reliable source on the minimum wage.

Berman

- Minimumwage.com is a site created by Richard Berman and Company, a public relations firm that receives funds from the restaurant and hotel lobbies. In general, businesses like restaurants and hotels are against raising the minimum wage because they would make less money if they had to pay their workers more.

- This source probably has a strong perspective against raising the minimum wage and not a lot of motivation to present information that would make a minimum wage increase look like a good thing. I'm starting to question how reliable this source is for balanced information about minimum wage policy.

- Before I completely trust this information about the Employment Policies Institute and minimumwage.com, I need to remember that this is just one source. I need to seek out multiple,

trustworthy accounts on a topic to gain a better understanding than relying on a single source.

- I have a couple of options here: I could keep reading the article and dig into evaluating the evidence they provide about Berman and his PR firm. Or I could see if I find corroborating information on minimumwage.com and Employment Policies Institute in other sources that I'm familiar with.

- Note: If you want to spend more time on this, you could continue your modeling by going back to the search results and investigating what another source, like the New York Times, has to say on the topic.

Recap

- In trying to figure out who is behind the website minimumwage.com, not only did I have to check its "About" page, but I had to read laterally—to see what other sites said about the website I was investigating.