

Media & Democracy

Evaluating information assignment

Objectives

- Students will understand that evaluating information is essential to a thriving democracy.
- Students will understand that different criteria for evaluating information exist.
- Students will be skilled at choosing which evaluation criteria are most relevant in different contexts.
- Students will be skilled at using evaluation criteria to evaluate information.

Performance Tasks

You are an elected official charged with educating community members of your town/city on elements important to critically evaluating information. Design an app that will explain what questions to ask when they see information. Use visuals and words to illustrate how your app would be organized (either on the attached template, freehand drawing, or using a website like Wix.com in mobile view).

Requirements

- [A] Start with an introductory paragraph or two explaining why it's important to know how to evaluate information.
- [B] Then, write an outline detailing at least six elements important to consider when evaluating information in a specific context (choose online information, newspaper articles, or the like). Explain what to look for in each element and why each element is important.
- Use at least 5 credible sources to support your points in the opening paragraph and outline. Two of these sources may be class readings/videos. University libraries are another good place to find this information.
- [C] Design an app that incorporates these elements, heeding your role as an elected official and the audience's role as (for this assignment we'll assume) uneducated citizens on this issue. At minimum, include what the homepage of the app would include/look like, what pages you would include, and what information will be on each of those pages. Include a short explanation of why you included what you did on each page (no outside sources required).
- [D] Your app should include at least two examples of your elements in action. In a step-by-step plan, show the users of the app how they can use your criteria to evaluate these examples. [If this is too difficult to demonstrate visually, just show where it would be on your app and write it in a Word document.]

Grading

- Outline advances a relevant and coherent argument about which elements are most important in evaluating information.
- Opening paragraph and outline include at least 5 credible sources total, two of which may be class readings.
- Attention to audience: app design is easy to navigate and incorporates elements in ways that a general audience could understand.
- App includes at least two thorough examples of elements "in action."

Template for the assignment:

Outline:

[A]

[Introductory paragraph or two on why it's important to know how to evaluate information – tie in the role of information in a democracy]

[short paragraph that indicates the context you chose (online information, newspaper articles, journal articles, etc.) and a summary of the six elements you chose]

[B]

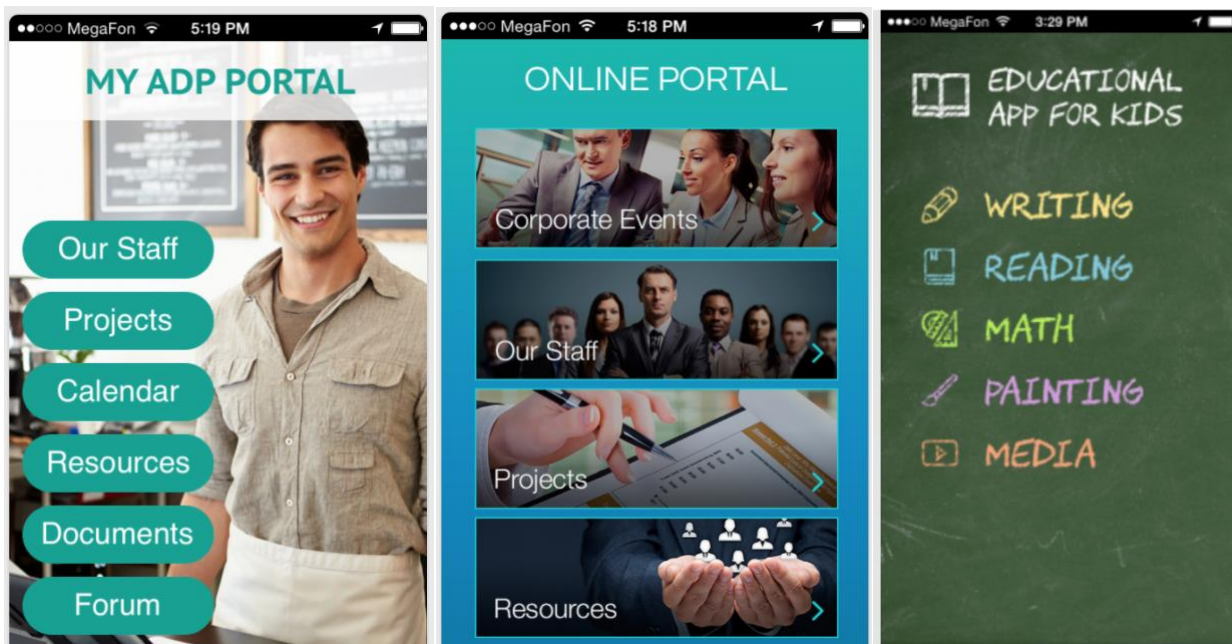
- I. Element #1: [insert element #1. Example: Author.]
 - A. [Explanation and evidence on what to evaluate (for this example, perhaps it would be education, expertise, contact information, other publications by this person) and why it's important to evaluate these things about the author]
 - B. [Explanation and evidence on what to evaluate and why evaluating this aspect is important]
 - C. [Explanation and evidence on what to evaluate and why evaluating this aspect is important]
 - D. [More explanation and evidence as needed]
- II. Element #2: [insert element #2.]
 - A. [Explanation and evidence on what to evaluate and why evaluating this aspect is important]
 - B. [Explanation and evidence on what to evaluate and why evaluating this aspect is important]
 - C. [Explanation and evidence on what to evaluate and why evaluating this aspect is important]
 - D. [More explanation and evidence as needed]

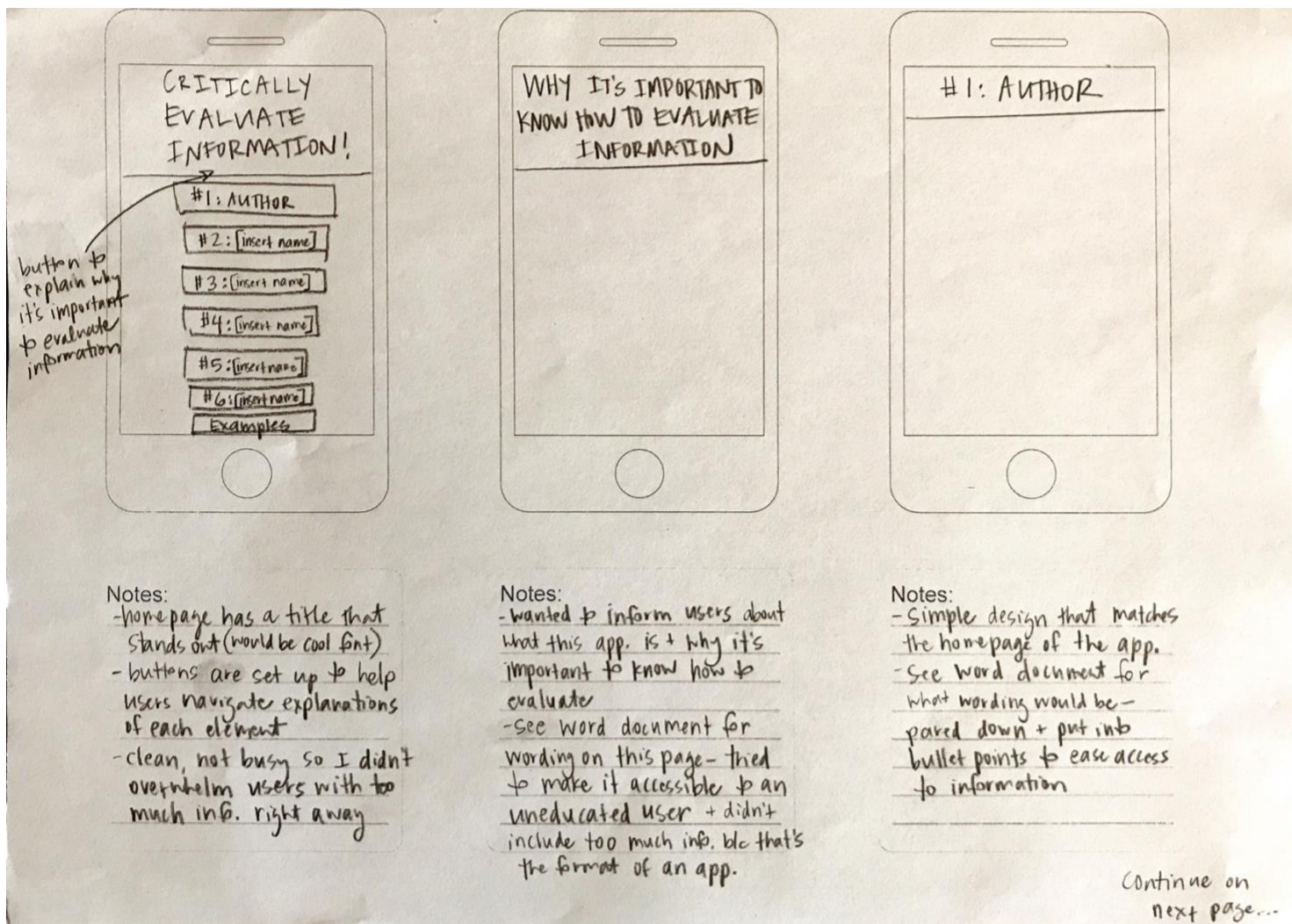
[Continue for Elements 3-6.]

[C]

App:

Examples of homepage design ideas – list-style buttons; design goes through entire app





Wording for "Why it's important to know how to evaluate information" app page:
[re-word and incorporate ideas you use in the opening paragraph of the outline]

Wording for "#1: Author" app page:
[re-word bullet points from point #1 in your outline]

[D]

Example #1 used to explain the elements in my app:

Title of article: "Want to engage students? Have them create apps"

URL of article: <https://www.eschoolnews.com/2014/05/30/students-create-apps-521/>

#1: Author

Dennis Pierce, Editorial Director, eSchool News

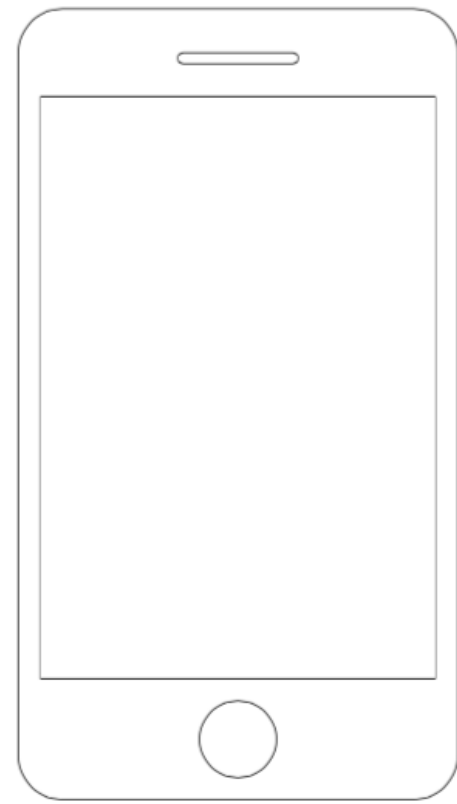
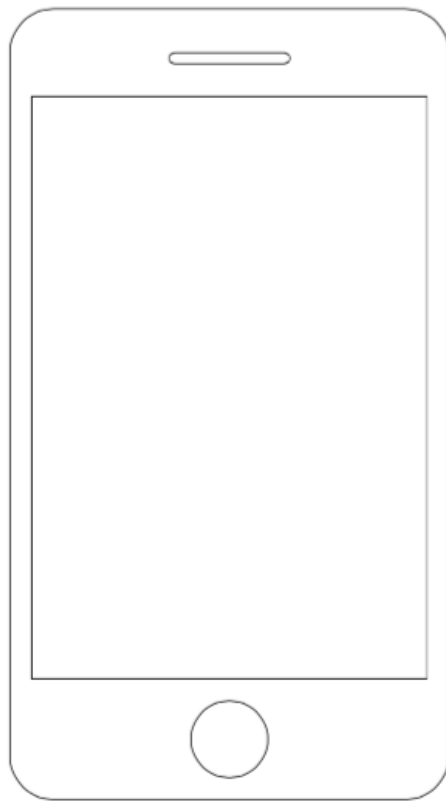
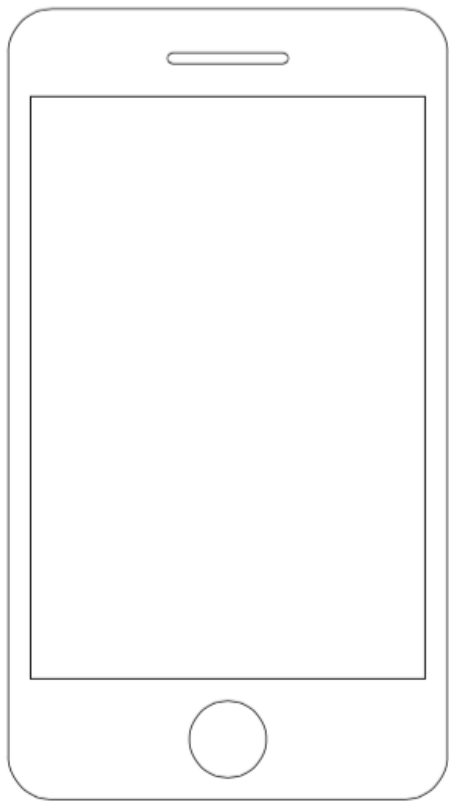
[use the method you advance in your outline to show citizens how you would investigate Dennis Pierce – copy/paste results you find]

#2: [insert element #2 here]

[use the method you advance in your outline to show citizens how they would investigate this element – copy/paste results you find]

[Continue listing elements #3-#6]

Example #2 used to explain the elements in my app:
[same format as example #1]



Notes:

Notes:

Notes:

Media & Democracy Evaluating Information Assignment Rubric

- ☐ Introductory paragraph or two on why it's important to evaluate information – tie in role of information in a democracy
- ☐ Short paragraph that indicates the context (online information, newspaper articles, journal articles, etc.) and a short summary of the six elements
- ☐ Six elements – explain what to look for in each element and why each element is important
- ☐ App design – heeds role as an elected official and the audience's role as uneducated citizens on the issue
 - ☐ homepage of the app
 - ☐ what pages would be included
 - ☐ why that information is included on each page
- ☐ Two examples used to explain the elements in the app

	Outline advances a relevant and coherent argument about which elements are most important in evaluating information	Sources	Clear argument for role and audience choices
4	Outline details all six elements (student explains what to look for and why those elements are important) and writing shows student completely understands concepts.	Student includes at least five sources and all are credible.	App design is easy to navigate and incorporates elements in ways that a general audience could understand.
3	Outline details most of the six elements (student explains what to look for and why those elements are important) and writing shows student mostly understands concepts.	Student includes 4-5 sources. One or two sources are not credible.	App design is mostly easy to navigate and may have some minor issues in terms of incorporating elements in ways that a general audience could understand.
2	Outline includes some of the six elements (student explains what to look for and why those elements are important) and writing does not show understanding of topics.	Student includes 2-3 sources. Three or four sources are not credible.	App design is somewhat easy to navigate and may have some major issues in terms of incorporating elements in ways that a general audience could understand.
1	Outline does not include all six elements and writing is mostly copying information directly from the source rather than explaining in student's own words.	Student includes 1-2 sources. Four or more sources are not credible.	App design is difficult to navigate and has major issues in terms of incorporating elements in ways that a general audience could understand.

Comments:

Example assignment (app not included – will be sent soon):

It is important to know how to evaluate information for the sake of having an informed society. Having an informed citizenry is one of the most important pieces of a functioning democracy; a democracy that is built on representatives that American citizens elect to office. Citizens that are informed elect officials that do their jobs well and whose choices benefit the country as a whole. When false information is swirling around on social media and the news, the public is being misinformed and thus cannot formulate educated opinions on current events, policies, and individuals running for office. With all of the “fake news” that seems to be circulating around the internet these days, it is important for consumers to understand the importance of evaluating the information they are gathering for correctness. Spreading false information on the internet does nothing to bolster our democracy. Instead it tears it down. It’s important that citizens have access to correct information to help them formulate their own opinions on events, candidates, and policies so that we are not relying on others to form our opinions. In order to form opinions based in fact, it is important to have access to accurate information. Furthermore, it is important that news consumers understand the steps to evaluate information they encounter for accuracy. Knowing the importance of evaluating information and how to actually do it successfully instills confidence that information citizens spread on the internet is factual and worthy of sharing. Below, I will detail six steps that I believe are the most important for evaluating information. For people who have not learned this concept before, these steps will be easy to follow and will allow them to become more informed citizens. I will be focusing primarily on evaluating information that is found from online sources.

1. Research the author(s)

- a. Begin by checking to see if the author has contact information listed by their writing. This can include an email address, a Facebook profile, a Twitter account, a LinkedIn profile, or a website link, among other things.
 - i. Any of these forms of communication show the reader that the author is open to comments, critique, and corrections of their work.
- b. Check the author’s place of education. This can be accomplished by a simple Google search if the author is well-known. If not, check to see if they have a LinkedIn profile with their contact information. This would also likely lead to a description of their education.
 - i. An author’s education is important to research to recognize any biases that might be present in the writing before investing time in reading their work.
- c. Although not a make or break on their credibility, look at the author’s social media platforms. Is their account verified? Do they have a decent number of followers? These are good indications that the author is a reputable source of information.
 - i. Social media is a big influencer on the spread of news in our society. Sharing information from a credible author on Facebook or Twitter ensures the spread of factual information.
- d. Utilize Google Scholar to look for previous work written by an author.
 - i. Previous work can be peer-reviewed which shows how other intellectuals judge their work (Evaluating Credibility).
- e. Check the organization that an author is writing for. If the author is writing for the New York Times or Washington Post, they likely have a strong commitment to journalistic standards (Entman).
 - i. This means that the authors go through an intense fact-checking process with editors and the information they give to readers will be factual to the best of their knowledge.
 - ii. These journalistic institutions also correct their work if it is found inaccurate. This furthers the spread of true information.

- f. Here is a good example from the Washington Post that shows the authors' credibility and links to social media. It also includes a place for comments on the article.



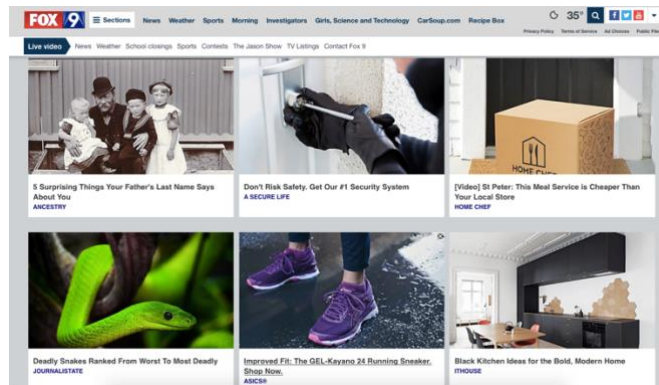
2. Utilize a fact-checking website

- a. A good practice to use before sharing any information on the internet that you think could be factually inaccurate is to use a fact-checking website.
- b. Fact-checking websites do the preliminary work of evaluating claims made in an article for you so you don't have to spend as much time on this step (Webliteracy).
 - i. They will research the claim and tell you whether it is factual and find the original source of the information.
- c. Examples of good fact-checking websites include:
 - i. Snopes
 - ii. Politifact
 - iii. Washington Post Fact-Checker
 - iv. NPR Fact-Checker
- d. In addition to these sites, another good source to use is Wikipedia (Webliteracy).
 - i. Contrary to what you may have heard, Wikipedia requires multiple sources before making a claim on any topic on their website. These sources are all footnoted at the bottom of a Wikipedia page which can lead to more information on anything a reader is researching.

3. Identify sponsored content & clickbait stories

- a. Identifying sponsored content is an important tool for evaluating information on the internet because it allows the reader to recognize biases that could be present in the information.
- b. Sponsored content usually shows up at the bottom of a webpage where links to other articles will show up. (Often these are stories with shocking headlines trying to entice a reader to click on them, aka "clickbait.")
 - i. Companies that advertise on a page often have control over what kinds of sponsored content are shown on a page, thus leading to more bias (Gillin).
- c. Clickbait stories make money each time someone clicks on them. For this reason, the information they provide does not need to be fully accurate or even true at all. They just need to have a shocking headline to get someone to click on them to make money (Gillin).
- d. Sponsored content is biased because it usually makes the webpage more money when it is shown on the page.
 - i. This means that the information shared in a story could be influenced by whoever owns the sponsored content on the page.

e. Here is an example of what sponsored content could look like:



- i. This example is from Fox 9 News (which is a good source for local information) but still includes some sponsored content. (It even tells the reader that it “includes advertiser stories.”)
- ii. Pay close attention to what kinds of ads pop up. The top right ad catered its message to St. Peter since it knows that’s where I’m located.
- iii. The bottom left message is shocking and tries to get you to look at it with bright colors.
- iv. These are all examples of information and articles to avoid.

4. Evaluate the amount and type of sources used

- a. Sources are one of the most important tools for evaluating information. Checking the number of sources used in an article and the types of those sources will allow the reader to make good judgements on whether the information presented is credible or not.
- b. Checking the number of sources:
 - i. Most news articles that you read online are not going to have bibliographies at the end detailing all of the sources they used.
 - ii. This is ok, but there should be sources included in a news article. Between 3 and 5 sources (at minimum) is a good parameter to use for an average news source.
 1. Although some articles may have fewer sources, they can still be trustworthy and useful. News consumers should use good judgement based on the other 5 aspects of evaluating information found in this outline.
- c. Types of sources:
 - i. The most useful type of source found in a news article is a primary source. A primary source is a firsthand account of something that happened that is being reported on (Santiago Canyon College).
 - ii. Examples of primary sources include:
 1. eyewitness accounts of an event
 2. video coverage and audio recordings
 3. internet communication such as comments, emails, etc.
 4. photographs
 5. official government documents
 6. speech transcripts
 - iii. Any of these six primary sources (among *many* other types) and especially when used in combination of each other, cited in an article should indicate to a reader that a source is credible.

5. Compare articles on the same topic

- a. A good news reader should read various articles on a topic to get perspective on a topic from different sides.

- i. Knowing that all news media has an inherent bias, a news consumer should seek different perspectives to gain an understanding of an event, policy, or candidate from new angles that may challenge their current thinking.
- b. For example, getting all of one's information from MSNBC is going to lead to an extremely left-leaning view of America. On the same token, only getting articles from Fox News will lead to a

Liberals have a responsibility too: make climate change a top issue ...
<https://www.theguardian.com/Environment/Climate-change>
 Jun 6, 2017 - For too long, liberals have been treating climate change as a third or fourth tier issue. As the US exits the Paris Climate Accord, it's time for liberals to re-evaluate an issue that subsumes all others. ... On Thursday when the announcement hit that Trump was taking America out of ...

What liberals get wrong about climate change - Axios
<https://www.axios.com/what-the-left-gets-wrong-about-climate-change-2474190719...>
 Aug 21, 2017 - Democrats and environmental groups too often let their ideological agendas get in the way of addressing climate change.

Climate change - Liberal Party of Canada
<https://www.liberal.ca/realchange/climate-change/>
 We will provide national leadership and join with the provinces and territories to take action on climate change, put a price on carbon, and reduce carbon ...

Why liberals care about climate change, but not abortion | Blogs ...
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/.../why-liberals-care-about-climate-change-but-not-abortion...>
 Jun 8, 2017 - For years, one of those issues has been climate change, a hot topic for both progressives — who wish to utilize taxes (and what else?) to solve ...

Mike Pence Paints Climate Change as Liberal Issue - Esquire
www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/news/.../mike-pence-climate-change-liberals/
 Jun 2, 2017 - Again, we yearn for the days when the late Doghouse Riley was keeping us all informed on the doings of Mike Pence, the remarkably ...

Limbaugh: Hurricane Irma Coverage Is Liberal Media Plot to Advance ...
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/limbaugh-hurricane-irma-coverage-is-liberal-media-pl...>
 Sep 5, 2017 - Limbaugh: Hurricane Irma Coverage Is Liberal Media Plot to Advance 'Climate-Change Agenda'. The talk-radio host accused media and ...

right-leaning view.

- c. The same can be true with liberal and conservative blogs, TV networks, Facebook pages, etc. Good news consumers should seek different angles.

Conservative groups shrug off link between tropical storm Harvey and ...
<https://www.theguardian.com/USNews/Hurricane-Harvey>
 Aug 30, 2017 - Conservative groups with close links to the Trump administration have sought to ridicule the link between climate change and events such as ...

We Need Conservatives to Fight Climate Change - Bloomberg
<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/.../we-need-conservatives-to-fight-climate-change>
 Sep 12, 2017 - We Need Conservatives to Fight Climate Change. If they join the battle, they're uniquely positioned to make a difference. by: Noah Smith.

Study: On climate change and elsewhere ... - Skeptical Science
<https://skepticalscience.com/politicians-more-conservative-than-citizens.html>
 Jul 14, 2017 - The conservative bias in Republican politicians' perceptions of ... The survey didn't include any questions about climate change, but that's ...

A conservative-leaning court just issued a surprise ruling on climate ...
<https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/.../court-ruling-coal-climate-change>
 Sep 19, 2017 - Under the National Environmental Policy Act, federal agencies have to consider how a given proposal both affects climate change and is ...

Why Do Most American Conservatives Still Refuse To Believe In ...
<https://bigthink.com/.../why-do-most-american-conservatives-still-refuse-to-believe-in...>
 97% of scientists agree that humans are causing global warming, yet belief in climate change continues to depend on political beliefs above all else.

Is a Conservative Climate Movement Heating Up? | InsideClimate News
<https://insideclimatenews.org/.../conservatives-for-clean-energy-climate-change-action...>
 Jul 25, 2017 - Optimists see hope in growing GOP support for renewable energy, but many Republicans still steer clear of anything that says climate change.

- d. In the internet age, it is easy to find different perspectives on any given topic.
- e. Let's use climate change as an example. In this example, I am changing the search terms surrounding "climate change" to gain new perspective on the subject.

(continued on next page)

- i. I searched "climate change liberal" and this is what I found. Here, there are a lot of conservative sites painting climate change as a liberal issue, hoax, or media plot.
- ii. Then, I searched "climate change conservative." Here, I found the opposite. Liberal sites claiming that conservatives refuse to believe in climate change and claiming that they need to join the liberal side.
- f. While climate change may be more of an opinion based issue, these google searches show how different articles on the same topic of climate change can be when they come from different sides. Critical news consumers need to get opinions from both sides to form their own.

6. Check headlines

- a. If all else fails, checking headlines is a quick and easy way to decide whether a news source is credible - or even worth looking at in the first place.
- b. Headlines that aim to grab your attention with flashy punctuation, bright colors, or emotional trigger words should be avoided.
 - i. Often, these might be examples of clickbait articles that are aiming to only make money. These articles promise a good story, but usually have no real evidence to back up the claim made in their headline.
- c. Headlines that are succinct and use minimal punctuation are good indicators that an article's

At least 10 dead, more than 100 missing as wildfires ravage California's wine country

purpose is to inform rather than persuade or make money.

- d. Let's look at an example.
 - i. In this example from the Washington Post, the headline uses the minimum amount of words to convey its message and with minimal punctuation.
 1. The Washington Post is a reputable source based off of the headline and the other five guidelines used in this outline.
 - ii. In this example from mirror.co.uk, the headline is shocking, using words that make the reader emotional.

Couple aged 100 and 99 'too frail to escape home' among dead as fires ravage California

Charles and Sara Rippey, who recently celebrated 75 years of marriage, perished in the blaze together, family said

Cited Sources:

Caulfield, Michael A. "Four Moves." Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers, Self-Published, 8 Jan. 2017, webliteracy.pressbooks.com/chapter/four-strategies/.

Entman, Robert M. "The Nature and Sources of News." The Press: Institutions of American Democracy, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, pp. 52.

Gillin, Joshua. "How Clickbait Ads Make Money for Fake News Sites." PunditFact, 4 Oct. 2017, www.politifact.com/punditfact/article/2017/oct/04/more-outrageous-better-how-clickbait-ads-make-mone/.

"Santiago Canyon College." Identifying Primary and Secondary Resources, www.sccollege.edu/Library/Pages/primarysources.aspx.

"Step-by-Step Guide & Research Rescue: Evaluating Credibility." Subject Guides, guides.lib.byu.edu/c.php?g=216340&p=1428399.

