

Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Information Literacy

This week’s lesson covers the basics of Information Literacy, an area of study originating in the library sciences field that has grown to provide a framework for managing any project, especially those involving the use of online resources to find, understand and use information.

The reason Information Literacy is such an important component of critical thinking is that it provides guidance for how to obtain the *background knowledge* needed to understand an issue. For logic and other critical thinking tools cannot make up for a lack of facts and other background material related to any subject under review, debate or discussion.

The key components (or “Canons”) of Information Literacy include:

- Locating Information – Finding needed information from online or offline sources
- Evaluating Information- Examining information for quality (testing it for bias, accuracy, timeliness, relevance and sufficiency)
- Organizing Information – Putting information you have located and evaluated into some kind of order or categories
- Synthesizing Information – Using the information you have located, evaluated and organized to create something new (called a “work product”)
- Communicating Information – Sharing the product of your work with others

Students should understand that once they have communicated something they have created (such as a news story or blog entry), that others will find and evaluate that work product based on the same Information Literacy principles the students used (or should have used) during their research.

Terminology

Important vocabulary terms used in this lesson include:

- Information Literacy
- Search engine
- Meta search engine
- Information Literacy steps (including Locating, Evaluating, Organizing, Synthesizing and Communicating Information)
- Tests for evaluating information (including tests for bias, accuracy, relevance, timeliness and sufficiency)
- Work product

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Goals

The goal of this lesson is to give students an understanding of:

- The importance of background knowledge needed to understand an issue or argument
- Why information Literacy emerged from the library studies field and when libraries can provide better (or different) information than online sources
- How to use a search engine (including selecting the best search engine and key words, and how to use advanced search options)
- How to use the results of a search to locate relevant sources and how to use those sources to search for additional information resources
- The importance of the Internet as a communications tool, connecting researchers with experts ready (and often eager) to answer their questions
- How to evaluating information for quality
- That information which has been located and evaluated needs to be organized (put into some kind of order or categories), synthesized into something new (called a “work product); and (often) communicated to others

Primary Resources

The following resources are available at the www.criticalvoter.com web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter Podcast 008 – Information Literacy:** A 30 minute audio lesson covering information literacy
- **Quiz** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has listened to and understood the podcast.
- **Blog Entries** – The Critical Voter blog contains multiple blog entries dealing with the issues covered in the podcast (look for entries the week of September 23, 2012 or use the categories menu to look for stories in the category of Information Literacy).

Additional Resources

Links to additional information can be found on the [Critical Voter Resources page](#).

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Suggested Activities

Activity	Notes on this activity
<p>Have students listen to the podcast and answer the quiz questions to ensure they have listened to and understood the concepts covered in the lesson.</p>	<p>The podcast can be played in class or assigned as homework.</p> <p>The quiz is made up of four questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has listened to the podcast lesson in its entirety.</p>
<p>Choose a relevant topic (such as a current news item) and assign groups of students the task of using different search strategies (refining key words, advanced search options etc.) to try to reduce a list of search results to fewer than 100 links.</p>	<p>Explore the strategy each group used and review the results to see how closely each group’s final set of results match up.</p> <p>Discuss when some search strategies may be more useful than others when trying to locate different types of information (chronological news searches for time-sensitive information, searching through specific known sources like a newspaper site, etc.)</p>
<p>Review an article on a controversial subject in Wikipedia and compare it with an article on the same subject that appears in an edited source such as a traditional encyclopedia or online library resource.</p>	<p>Show students the Talk page related to a Wikipedia article to demonstrate the ongoing reviewing, editing and discussion regarding an article. Discuss what this means with regard to the steps for evaluating information (especially with regard to accuracy, bias and timeliness).</p> <p>Use this example to review with students the difference between information on the Open Web vs. other sources (such as databases of professionally edited and reviewed articles available from the library).</p>
<p>Provide students with a set of resources relating to a particular subject (or use the information sources that resulted from the search refinement they performed on the previous classroom exercise described above).</p> <p>Ask them to organize this material into what they considered to be high quality vs. low quality information.</p>	<p>Discuss what criteria they used to determine the quality of an information source in the context of bias, accuracy, timeliness, relevance and sufficiency.</p> <p>Discuss others ways they could organize the information they found (chronologically, thematically, etc.) and determine what kind of work products could be created from their final list of information sources.</p>