Read Laterally

Learning Objectives:

- Students will differentiate between lateral and vertical reading.
- Students will master search techniques that allow them to locate external opinions and facts about a source quickly.
- Students will be able to identify the criteria used to determine a source's credibility.

Reading laterally means to see what authoritative sources have to say about a site. This contrasts with reading vertically: starting at the top, reading straight down, and analyzing a site within its own context. Reading laterally means to read across sites.

The technique of reading laterally would fit within a session on evaluating sources but would also fit in a more skills-based session on online search techniques. If you have more time, students can practice these techniques on news samples you supply. (For samples, see https://fourmovess.blog/)

When talking about this technique in class, a first step is to define the terms. A visual such as the one below is very effective in making the distinction. (Note: this example uses a factual news story.)

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Demonstrate the **-site:** search. In Google, the hyphen acts as the Boolean operator “**NOT,**” so this search will look for mentions of a website but keep the website itself out of the results list.

Also, use this search technique to check on organizations and individuals outside of any websites they might maintain. The search below will show that the American College of Pediatricians is a fringe anti-LGBT hate group. *(Note: Use quotes so Google will search on the phrase “American College of Pediatrics” rather than each separate word.)*
What Makes a Trustworthy Source?

Reading laterally raises the question, how do you know to trust a source’s opinion about the source you are researching? That is, what makes any source trustworthy?

Wikipedia’s guidelines for determining reliability provide guidance. This organization determines reliability by examining the process, aim, and expertise of a source.

Process means a reliable source should have a process in place for encouraging accuracy, verifying facts, and correcting mistakes.

Aim is “defined by what the publication, author, or media source is attempting to accomplish. Aims are complex. Respected scientific journals, for example, aim for prestige within the scientific community, but must also have a business model. A site like the New York Times relies on ad revenue but is also dependent on maintaining a reputation for accuracy” (Caulfield, *Evaluating a Website*).

Expertise depends on context. According to Wikipedians, researchers or practitioners in a field get precedence.

In class, you could walk students through these criteria. Alternately, “what makes a trustworthy source?” can also be used as a discussion question.

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