



Citizens, Not Spectators

Lesson 2: Where Do the Candidates Stand?

Student Handout 2: Evaluating Information Sources

Introduction

You've heard the old adage, "Don't believe everything you read," a wise warning which is too often ignored. In this day and age of instant access to information, the warning is more important than ever. With sound bites coming from every direction, what should a person believe? Today, more than ever, citizens need to know how to scrutinize information sources and discern between factual articles and opinion pieces. There are a variety of ways to do this. You have probably discussed many of these tips in your classes. This handout is a brief reminder of the various tips you can use when you research issues or topics. Your teacher will review it with you in conjunction with the lesson you're currently involved in.

Fact v. Opinion

Webster's Dictionary defines facts as: anything that is done or happens; any statement strictly true; truth; reality, e.g., The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776.

Opinion is defined as: indicating a belief, view, sentiment, conception, e.g., Blue is the prettiest color in the spectrum.

How to Recognize Bias in a News Article

This technique is applicable to any news story in a website, newspaper, magazine, or television program.

1. Read the news article.
2. Identify the five Ws and one H of the article: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of the article.

3. See if you can rewrite the article, using the same information, to tell a completely different story.
4. Look at how the writer treats the people he is writing about.
5. Pay attention to the overall tone of the article.
6. What is missing from the article?
7. Watch for buzzwords.
8. Does the writer try to identify with you or label you (or others)?
9. Observe the placement of the story.
10. Consider how people are portrayed through pictures.
11. Look for at least two sides to every story.
12. If statistics are provided or studies are mentioned, dig a little deeper.
13. If a headline or chart claims “the worst/best/highest/lowest in X years,” do some research. A comparison to years earlier or immediately following may prove otherwise.
14. Learn to recognize a news release.

How to Evaluate the Credibility of a Source

1. Think about how reliable you need the information to be.
2. Consider the medium with which you are working.
3. Research the author.
4. Check the date.
5. Investigate the publisher.
6. Determine the intended audience.
7. Check the reviews.
8. Evaluate the author’s sources.
9. Identify bias.
10. Evaluate consistency.
11. Investigate the financial or funding sources for sponsored research, websites, etc.