**SSC 2030: Strategies for evaluating sources and claims**

***“Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it…”*** *- Jonathan Swift, 1710*

Untruths have been with us since man developed speech. The written and printed word allowed untruths, rumors and lies to persist, to gain some veneer of authenticity and to be spread more easily. And the internet has let loose a flood of fake news, biased pages with hidden agendas and click-bait. It is now much more difficult to distinguish between factual, unbiased news stories written by well-trained journalists from false information designed to inflame emotions and manipulate public opinion and achieve self-serving goals. Even tenured professors of history at august institutions of higher education can be deceived.

How can you avoid being manipulated and find your way to reliable information?

1. ACCORD or CRAAPP
2. Lateral reading

Most methods focus on the credibility of authors and sources and make an evaluation by looking at the article in question. Popular examples of this approach are known by their acronyms, ACCORD and CRAAPP. Both use checklists and neither suggests additional searching.

**ACCORD** is a method of assessing sources of information (Research 101, Ithaca College Library). ACCORD is an acronym representing the steps of the method.  
1) Agenda: What is the author’s purpose?

2) Credentials: What are the author’s credentials? Is she an expert?

3) Citations: Does the author cite sources for her facts and assertions?

4) Oversight: Is publication of the article overseen by an editor or by peer review?

5) Relevance: Does the source suit your needs?

6) Date: How recent is the article or publication? Is there newer information out there?

* ACCORD checklist

<https://library.ithaca.edu/sp/assets/users/_lchabot/ACCORDchecklist_Final.pdf>

* Quiz: Use ACCORD to evaluate three articles about the effect of red wine consumption on heart disease courtesy of Ithaca College.

<https://library.ithaca.edu/r101/evaluating/>

* Exercise: Evaluate three articles on the effects of neonicotinoids on bees.

<https://www.carli.illinois.edu/sites/files/pub_serv/ICForum150618GrossmannHandout.pdf>

Note that the **CRAAPP** method is very similar to ACCORD (CSU Chino, 20XX).

1. Currency
2. Relevance
3. Authority
4. Accuracy
5. Purpose
6. Process

If you can’t access the internet and have to rely only on the article you are looking at, ACCORD and CRAAPP might be your best bet. But if you have internet access or a fearsomely trained reference librarian at hand, there’s a better option.

**Lateral reading** (aka lateral searching) is a method of fact checking developed by professional fact-checkers. A recent study by researchers at Stanford University found that fact-checkers were faster and more accurate than academically trained historians or undergraduate students at Stanford University at evaluating the credibility of sources or claims (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017). So, what is lateral reading? Well, fact-checkers don’t spend significant time on a search result or web site until they have checked it out by*“moving quickly away from the original text, opening up a series of tabs in a browser to judge the credibility of its author and the sources it cites.”* (Kamenetz, 2017).And using lateral reading, a professional fact-checker can judge the credibility of an author, website or claim in 60 – 90 seconds!

In an NPR interview, author Michael Caulfield distilled the lateral reading approach down into ‘4 moves and a habit’ (Kamenetz, 2017). He describes the four moves as:

**1.** **Check for previous work:** Look around to see whether someone else has already fact-checked the claim or provided a synthesis of research. [Some places to look: Wikipedia, Snopes, Politifact and NPR's own Fact Check website.]

**2. Go upstream to the source:** Most web content is not original. Get to the original (aka primary) source to understand the trustworthiness of the information. Is it a reputable scientific journal? Is there an original news media account from a well-known outlet? If that is not immediately apparent, then move to step 3.

**3. Read laterally:** Once you get to the source of a claim, read what other people say about the source (publication, author, etc.). The truth is in the network.

**4. Circle back:** If you get lost or hit dead ends or find yourself going down a rabbit hole, back up and start over.

**Habit? Check your gut:** If you have a strong emotional reaction you may have fallen prey to a common tactic that appeals to human’s ‘lizard brain’ and inhibits critical thinking. Triggering strong emotions causes us to stop thinking and share the feeling and the information that caused it. This ancient response probably saved human groups from predators but isn’t useful for evaluating truth.

**Fact checking** is now done by a variety of organizations, so use a search engine to see if a fact checker has information about an author, organization or claim. For information about the group of fact-checkers shown here and links to them, see ‘The 10 best fact-finding sites’ from Media Bias/Fact Check (2016), or use your search engine

<https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/2016/07/20/the-10-best-fact-checking-sites/>

* Fact Check
* Politifact
* Snopes
* Open Secrets
* The sunlight foundation
* Poynter Institute
* Flack Check
* Truth of Fiction
* Hoax Slayer
* Fact Check by the Washington Post
* NPR’s Fact-Check
* Truth Be Told
* Facts Can
* The Guardian’s Reality Check

For a journalist’s take on fact checking, have a look ‘Fact-finding resources by Mike Reilley, published by Journalist’s Toolbox and the Society of Professional Journalists. In addition to presenting fact-checking resources, Reilley explains how to use Google to verify the authenticity of online photos, videos, reports and more.

<https://www.journaliststoolbox.org/2018/08/20/urban_legendsfact-checking/>

You may find this series of four videos describing the process of lateral reading helpful:

* Online verification skills – 1. Introduction  
  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBU2sDlUbp8>
* Online verification skills – 2. Investigating the source  
  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hB6qjIxKltA>
* Online verification skills – 3. Finding the original source

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRZ-N3OvvUs>

* Online verification skills – 4. Look for trusted work

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJG7kFmS0FE>

Of course, as you are laterally reading you can ask yourself some of the great questions suggested by the checklist methods. Look for obvious agendas, bias and motivation behind ‘articles’, and follow the money!

**Exercises and assignment(s):**

Exercise 1: Use lateral reading to evaluate these three websites on climate change:

* Climate change science: causes of climate change (2016) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Retrieved from

<https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange_.html>

* Global warming (2016) In Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_warming>
* Lindzen, Richard (2005) Is there a basis for global warming alarm? The Independent Institute. Retrieved from

<http://www.independent.org/publications/article.asp?id=1714>

Exercise 2: Use lateral reading to evaluate these three articles:

* Lynn Dicks (2013) Bees, lies and evidence-based policy, Nature, 494, no. 7437: 283-283.

[http://www.nature.com/news/bees­lies­and­evidence­based­policy­1.12443](http://www.nature.com/news/beesliesandevidencebasedpolicy1.12443)

* Jon Entine (2014) Bee deaths reversal: As evidence points away from neonics as driver, pressure builds to rethink ban, Forbes, 5 February 2014.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonentine/2014/02/05/bee-deaths-reversal-as-evidence-points-away-from-neonics-as-driver-pressure-builds-to-rethink-ban/#7cdc4ba71432>

* Tapparo, Andrea, Daniele Marton, Chiara Giorio, Alessandro Zanella, Lidia Soldà, Matteo Marzaro, Linda Vivan, and Vincenzo Girolami. Assessment of the environmental exposure of honeybees to particulate matter containing neonicotinoid insecticides coming from corn coated seeds. Environmental Science & Technology 46, no. 5 (2012): 2592­2599.

<http://www.ask­force.org/web/Bees/Tapparo­Assessment­Environmental­Exposure­Honeybees­2012.pdf>

Assignment:

Complete exercise 1 as described above.

* Use lateral reading to evaluate one of the three articles on climate change.
* Post your conclusion to our discussion being sure to include your reasoning. Be complete and specific.
* Respond to at least two of your classmates’ posts.

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