

East Los Angeles College Library

Critical Thinking about Information—Outline

Student Learning Outcomes

SLO 1: Students will be able to verify the accuracy of information

SLO 2: Students will be able to recognize the difference between substantiated facts and opinions

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This workshop is problem-based and encourages critical thinking through comparison and corroboration.

It is presented in the form of a game to encourage student participation and active learning

More emphasis on concepts; less on tool-use because students will learn to use the tools as they play the game.

Addresses different learning styles:

Type 1 (concrete, reflective)—“why?”

Material in the workshop relate to their experience and interests (as in the Paris Hilton commercial)

Type 2 (abstract, reflective)—“what?”

Research methodology follows a logical order

Type 3 (abstract, active)—“how?”

They are given opportunities to work actively on well-defined tasks and to learn by trial-and-error in an environment that allows them to fail safely (no grades)

Type 4 (concrete, active)—“what if?”

They apply course material in new situations to solve real problems

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Bring to class:

- Copies of the “Critical Thinking about Information” handout
- Roster
- Attendance verification forms
- Date stamp
- Make sure the short video for this workshop is on the instructor’s desktop in the classroom

Begin by telling students about this workshop. Talk about why critical thinking is important when it comes to doing research. Talk about how information in books and even scholarly journals might not be accurate or true. Talk about corroborating sources. Talk about how they probably won’t have time to corroborate every single source they use in their research paper, but that they have to prioritize. Give examples of when it is important for them to corroborate info. Talk about how it’s usually a rule of thumb that if they can triangulate a piece of info (i.e., find 3 sources that say the same thing), that they can probably trust the info.

Talk about primary and secondary source documents. Explain the differences between the two. See if students can come up with examples.

Primary source docs from the govt. are a reliable source of data, and this is the kind of data that you need to use in your research papers if you want to get good grades.

The data could be on a wide range of topics: if you’re writing a paper about civil rights, the environment, homelessness, STDs, air pollution, etc. You’ll probably find information on all of these topics in magazines and newspapers (secondary sources), but magazines and newspaper articles don’t have a works cited list, so you don’t know where they’re getting their information, if the info is correct, or if they are omitting something on purpose.

But you can check govt. docs on these topics and see for yourself if what the media says is true or not. So the govt. has a rich variety of content, but most people don’t know where to look to find it. By the end of this workshop you will no longer be one of those people. I’m going to show you 2 tools you can use:

One of them is “Google US Government Search” <http://www.google.com/ig/usgov> (not affiliated with the US govt., strong search feature)—give short demo

And the other one (the better one, in my opinion) is “USA.gov” <http://www.usa.gov/> (affiliated with the US govt., directory structure)—give short demo

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Some things to mention and have students think about:

1. What is/are the “fact/s” being given to me here?
2. Where did the author get the “fact/s?”
3. Would a govt. resource be a good place to look?
4. Which branch and level of the govt. would cover this topic?

Now say, “we’re going to play a game called ‘*Who Do You Trust?*’. You can use either one of the tools I just showed you in order to play this game.”

First, watch this video

(I have this video and will install it on the desk top on the instructor’s computer)

Coalition for America's Priorities Ad: "Give and Take"

Announcer: In Washington it's called "give and take;" politicians give the wealthiest Americans a trillion dollar tax break, and take from Social Security and Medicare benefits.

(On Screen: Split screen with Paris Hilton look-alike on left getting her photo taken, on the right images of the elderly and doctors)

Senators give billionaires and heiresses a repeal of the estate tax, and take \$75 billion a year from our children's future. Unless you take action and stop this trillion-dollar giveaway. Contact your Senators today. Tell them to support real reform, not repeal, of the estate tax. Make it fair for all Americans.

(On Screen: Paid for by the Coalition for America's Priorities)

Next, have students look at this article. Ask them if they can tell where it comes from, etc. It’s from the Boston Globe, a reputable source. Then have them read just the middle paragraph in the abstract

[SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST:\[THIRD Edition\]](#)

ROBERT KUTTNER. Boston Globe Boston, Mass.:Jun 24, 2006. p. A.17

ABSTRACT

Unlike most of the undeclared Democratic field, [John Edwards] is not putting his finger to the prevailing wind. He's trying to change it. After his 2004 vice-presidential run, Edwards admirably went home to the University of North Carolina to head its Center on Poverty, Work, and Opportunity.

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By contrast, estate tax repeal would reward a few thousand mega- rich. However, wealth has become so highly concentrated that the cost would be **\$760 billion over a decade**. Keeping the estate tax as it was before the Bush cuts would affect only the top 2 percent, and the revenue could pay for much of Edwards' program to reward work.

This brings me back to Edwards' bravely unfashionable speech. Today there are 37 million poor people in America out of just under 300 million. Back when Franklin Roosevelt delivered his famous second inaugural address in 1937, declaring "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished," a third of Americans were indeed poor, and another third had good reason to fear poverty. The vulnerability of the non-poor was a major issue that FDR brilliantly energized.

Do Exercise 1 as you go through the following:

Tell students that this is a great commercial and article because they both give numbers. Numbers and statistics always looks impressive. Ask students if they know what estate tax is. Then tell them that for their English class they've decide to write a paper on the Estate Tax, and what might happen in the next 10 years if we got rid of it. Having seen and read the video and article, what would they say in their paper? How much are we going to lose over the next 10 years if we get rid of the Estate Tax?

Let's check the figures and see if what they say is correct:

USA.gov

"federal govt" → "executive branch" → "department of treasury" → "irs" → "tax stats" → "individual tax stats: all topics" → "estate tax"

OR

search for "irs" → click first link

search for "estate tax" → click second link

THEN

click "calendar year data tables" → click "By State: 2004"

Total Net Estate = 21,510,041 21,611,909*1000 = 21,611,909,000

So the figure is 21.5 billion, NOT 75 billion

Ten-year estimate: "Trillion Dollar Giveaway"; "\$760 billion" is a ten-year estimate

21.6*10 = 216 billion NOT one trillion or 760 billion

There's a huge difference. Would this affect what they wrote in their paper?

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Now move on to Exercise 2:

Republican Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania claims in a new book that a number of social ills got "much worse" after *Roe* was decided in 1973. The book is called *It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good*, released on July 4. It devotes several chapters to abortion, and one of them includes this argument:

Santorum, p. 250: Back before 1973, there were all sorts of claims in favor of legal abortion. Legal abortion would lead to less domestic violence, since young women would not be forced into unhealthy and inappropriate marriages. Fewer desperate women would commit suicide. There would be fewer out-of-wedlock births. There would be fewer divorces. There would be fewer children in poverty, less crime, and less child abuse, since all children would be wanted and grow up in stable families. **None of this happened. Not a single social ill improved as a result of legal abortion: in fact, they all got worse, much worse.**

Ask students to say what Santorum is claiming in the above passage. Write out the claims on the board as students say them.

He claims that since 1973 the following rates have increased:

1. Domestic violence

hard to find, but this is a possibility

USA.gov → search for "Bureau of Justice" → click "Bureau of Justice Statistics" → "criminal victimization" → Crime and Victimization in the Three Largest Metropolitan Areas, 1980-98 (this seems like the best choice) pg.2

(<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv3lma98.pdf>)

(Santorum is wrong, domestic violence rate has decreased (since 1979))

2. Female suicide

USA.gov → search for "census data" → Click "Census Bureau—Home Page" → Click "more" in the "people and households" section → Click "Deaths" under "population data by subject" → NCHS → "top 10 links: deaths/mortality" → tabulated data → tabulated data for 1900-98 → number of deaths → 1968-78: HIST290A_6878 (pg. 416) AND 1979-98: HIST290A_7998 (pg. 972)

(<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/dx196878.pdf> (1968-1978) pg.416)

(<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/statab/gmwk290a.pdf> (1979-1998) pg.83)

(Santorum is wrong, female suicide rate has decreased since 1973)

3. Out-of-wedlock births

USA.gov → search for "census data" → Click "Census Bureau—Home Page" → Click "more" in the "people and households" section → Click "Births" under "population data by subject" → NCHS → "top 10 links: births/natality" → "unmarried mothers, Series 21, No. 53 → pg.9 (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_21/sr21_053.pdf) → (Santorum is right, Out-of-wedlock birth rates have increased)

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4. Divorces

USA.gov → Do a search “divorce rates” → to the left “1970s and 1980s” → “The Rising Long-Term Trend ...” (<http://www.fdic.gov/bank/analytical/working/98-2.pdf> pg. 32)
(Santorum is right, divorce rates have increased)

5. Children in poverty

USA.gov → search for “census data” → Click “Census Bureau—Home Page” → click “poverty” (in the People and Households section) → click “historical tables” → people → table 10 (<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hst pov10.html>) →
(Santorum is right, children in poverty rates have increased)

6. Crime

USA.gov → search for “Bureau of Justice” → click “Bureau of Justice Statistics” → crime characteristics → “summary findings”
(http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict_c.htm)
(Santorum is wrong, crime rate has decreased since 1973)

7. Child abuse

hard to find

Have students locate the data to see if Santorum is right or wrong. Make sure they are filling in the info for Exercise 2 as they do their search.

Use NetSupport to have students share what they found.

Be sure to collect the 2 exercises before students leave.