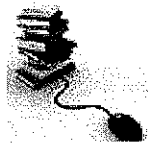




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Kids, Research, and the Internet: Fact vs. Fiction

Source: Alexandra Mayzler

★★★★★ (3 ratings)

Not long ago, gathering information for a paper implied a trip to the library. There, in the stacks of books, and often with the help of a librarian, a student would slowly but surely fill his arms with encyclopedias, reference books, and articles that would serve as the basis for the research. Today, the research process almost always starts with a visit to the computer. With just a few quick clicks, students can find everything from last night's baseball stats to pre-written essays to up-to-date information helpful for researching a project for history class. Although today's students don't always need to start their research at the library and can jump on the web for what seems like never-ending information, they lack the academic structure and certainty that a trip to the library would sustain. Where librarians are able to answer questions in order to help students to the right track there are fewer guides in the internet. Today's young researchers must be savvier about collecting data and discerning reputable and not so reputable information sources, which for many students is a difficult task.

Students today must be careful when surfing the web for their research. Figuring out which sites are reputable and which are not legitimate is not always an easy task, but a skill that students must hone. Students need to learn to practice caution in their choices of websites and understand the need to look for sites that present factual information. Here are some tips on helping your child validate information found on the web.

Don't believe everything you read

Just because the words are on the page, doesn't mean that those words are true. Remember that it is important to read carefully and cross-reference information. A site that simply states ideas or opinions and does not lead to any resources may not be a reputable site. Together with your child, visit the [Columbus entry on All About Explorers](#) and [Dog Island Free Forever](#) to see how what seems like a completely factual page of information could actually be very false. Not everything on the internet is factual, and it is important that students develop a critical eye for what is fact and what is fiction.

Identify the author

It is a good idea to remember that anyone can create a website and post almost anything on that website. A reputable site should have an author with credibility and authority in a field. The author's information should be readily visible with a link to credentials or published and peer reviewed articles. It is the lack of a vetted author that makes the popular website Wikipedia a site that should not be used for more than preliminary learning. Further, the author should present unbiased information with all sides of the issue presented fairly.

Check that the site and information are current

Information is usually most relevant on sites that are consistently maintained. Review when the site was created and when it was last updated. Are the links still active? If the page looks abandoned, it may not be up to date or correct. Also, does the site have pop-ups? Most scholarly sites don't.

Identify reputable sources

For students just learning how to do scholarly research, it may be a good idea to begin by brainstorming reputable sites that they can go to for information. For example, large city newspapers are trusted sources of current events. Information on American History and our government can be found <http://www.whitehouse.gov> or

<http://www.usa.gov>. Finally, introduce your children to search engines that are kid-friendly and compiled with students in mind. [KidsClick](#) a web search put together by librarians and [Kids Search Tool](#) a safe search that includes dictionary, thesaurus and encyclopedias are great places to get started. Also, check to see if the website has a trademark.

Most importantly, communicate with your children about internet use. Encourage your child to review information with you. Learning to use the internet for research is a process. For young students, it is helpful if a parent reviews the sites. It may be helpful to put an image filter in place so that offensive or inappropriate material is blocked. As children become more internet savvy, Caroline Demefack of The School for Children at Bank Street College of Education recommends a gradual progression to remove these filters in order to encourage independence and critical thinking. Some sites may be too sophisticated for students, meaning that the subject discussed or the language used may be too difficult to comprehend. Lastly, it is important that you encourage your family's values when it comes to browsing the internet, whether it be for school or for fun.

This article is written by Alexandra Mayzler



Aleandra Mayzler is the Founder and Director of [Thinking Caps Tutoring](#), a comprehensive tutoring company dedicated to developing innovative and individualized approaches to teaching. She participates in the coordination of the New York Dyslexia Association's annual conference, is a curriculum consultant for independent and public schools, and the author of study skills book to be published in September 2010. Alexandra spends her free time thinking about how to make studying easier, more interesting, and potentially even enjoyable!

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