

Patrick Cumpstone

World History

Finding and Evaluating Open Web Sources (updated 10-2019)

Information literacy topics:

- Determining best sources
- Searching strategies for information
- Evaluating sources
- Using technology tools

Objective: To learn to find relevant and reliable open web research sources, to evaluate these sources for reliability, and to use appropriate technology tools.

School Learning Expectation:

Academic-Writing: "Students will produce and distribute a variety of writing designed to entertain, inform, or argue, as well build and present knowledge derived from research."

During class:

Explain objective: To learn to find relevant and reliable open web research sources, to evaluate these sources for reliability, and to use appropriate technology tools.

1. Direct student to activity guide online at:

Amity website→**High School**→**AHS Library Information Center**
Find Online Stuff→**By Subject**→**History**→**Class Projects** →**(your teacher)**
→**Finding and Evaluating Open Web Sources**

2. Individual Analysis:

2.a. Student instructions:

Consider a web source. Imagine you are looking for information that discusses the influence that the French Revolution has had on the rest of the world from the end of the 18th century to the present.

Students view this document, and the web site where it is located.

[Legacies of the Revolution](#)

OR

[Health and hygiene in the 19th century](#) (if "Legacies" site does not work)

2.b. Students respond to this statement, in 3 minutes:

"This web resource has been judged to offer credible information that is appropriate for academic research. Find at least 3 reasons to show that this is true."

3. Discussion:

Share reasons why this website is appropriate for research (why the information here can be trusted). Categorize students responses under WHO/WHAT/WHERE/WHY/WHEN
Discuss the evaluation criteria:

Evaluation Criteria

-Who created it? Is this person (or organization) a qualified, reputable, expert? Is she **authoritative** (reliable)?

This individual article does not credit a specific author, but the "About this site" states that the two main authors and editors are Lynn Hunt (UCLA) and Jack Censer (George Mason University), here referred to as "internationally renowned scholars of the Revolution". We can follow up online for more information about these two scholars.

-What is the information like? Is it **accurate**, giving complete **coverage**, well-written, well-organized? Does it cite its sources? Are those sources reliable?

First of all, WHAT is this document?

This particular document is an original essay written by modern scholars. The web site includes a range of resources, including text, images, including English translations of primary-source documents from the 18th century. The essay does not cite sources as a research article would, but it does make reference to them in the body of the text. The web site as a whole is well-organized, with several ways of accessing the information.

-Where is the information from? Where is the site stored?

This is where we have to do some investigation, starting with the "About this site". This article is found in a website called the Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution. The collection is a collaboration of several well-known academic centers of study (the [Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media](#), part of George Mason University) and the [American Social History Project](#) (part of the City University of New York), and is supported by grants from the Florence Gould Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

-Why was the information or site created? Was the goal to present information objectively in a balanced way? If it aims to convince, does it address different points of view? Do the presenters have an identifiable political, ideological, or commercial goal that might slant their information?

There is no stated goal to this website, so we have to look at the purpose behind the entities that sponsor it. Looking at the [The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media](#), for example, we see that it's stated goal is to "create websites and open-source digital tools to preserve and present the past, transform scholarship across the humanities, advance history education and historical understanding, and encourage popular participation in the practice of history." Clearly, education is at the root of all the supporting institutions.

The authors, as expert historians, are espousing their own point of view, but we can assume that they are doing so from a perspective of informed reason, given their academic credentials and relationship with the supporting institutions.

-When was it created? Is it **current**? (sometimes currency/recent is not important)

The essay itself does not have a date, but the web site is dated 2001. It has no update date.

4. Presentation/discussion

Brainstorm and list various search terms from a topic sentence.

“The core concept of the French Revolution--the understanding that the masses have the same right to share society’s wealth as the privileged few--is the legacy that has informed every subsequent movement for independence or democracy anywhere in the world.”

-Think of key words or common expressions specific to the topic, such as **French -Revolution, legacy, independence, democracy...**

-Think of synonyms: **results, effects, struggle, uprising, republic, etc,**

-Think of the most important terms: **“French Revolution”**

-Think of terms that might sometimes be too limiting: **concept, masses,**

-Use “...” for phrases, ANDs, ORs, and parenthesis to structure search

Sample search: **French Revolution, effects, history**

5. Student activity

Students carry out individual search for a reliable research site, identifying the following information on this [FORM](#). The source does NOT have to be reliable; all that matters is evaluating it thoroughly.

Evaluation Criteria

-Who created it? Is this person (or organization) a qualified, reputable, expert? Is she **authoritative** (reliable)?

-What is the information like? Is it **accurate**, giving complete **coverage**, well-written, well-organized? Does it cite its sources? Are those sources reliable?

-Where is the information from? Where is the site stored? Remember that just having a page stored in a university does not mean the university backs your information.

-Why was the information or site created? Was the goal to present information objectively in a balanced way? If it aims to convince, does it address different points of view? Do the presenters have an identifiable political, ideological, or commercial goal that might slant their information?

-When was it created? Is it **current**? (sometimes currency/recent is not important)

-Conclusion: reliable for your purpose? YES/NO?

Where do I find this information:

- Who** -- Look in and follow-up people and organizations in:
About / Contact / “byline” (credits) / bottom of page / sidebars /
- What** -- Read and analyze content information in:
Titles / Text / Citations and References
- Where** -- Look in and follow-up on site and organization information in:
About / Contact / URL / Domain name
- Why** -- Look in and follow-up on author, site, and organization information in:
Text
- When** -- Look in:
bottom of page / sidebars / subtitle / “byline” (credits)

Sample Search Results: Unverifiable Source**[The French Revolution](#)**, by Richard Geib

While this essay is eye-catching, and well-written, the problem here is that it is hard to find out much about the author. Tracing the root URL, you see that this is a website for a history teacher named Rich Geib. While he may be a wonderful and rigorous historian, we know nothing about his qualifications to write about history with an acceptable level of balance and rigor, nor can we even guess about what his potential biases might be. This might be a great website to learn more about the topic, but it is basically a hobby site, and as such, is not appropriate for academic research.

Sample Search Results: Unreliable Sources**[The French Revolution](#)**, by Kelly Maura Monahan

This presentation done on the Prezi platform is typical of sites that CANNOT be used for research. If you read the text, you will realize that it is full of the errors in grammar and misuse of vocabulary too often seen in student work. This site is most likely a student's class project, and as such is completely inappropriate as a serious source.

For more information, see the attached Lesson Plan below.

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1. Go to activity guide online at:

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Find Online Stuff→By Subject→History→Class Projects →(your teacher)
→Finding and Evaluating Open Web Sources**

2. Individual Analysis:

2.a. *Consider a web source. Imagine you are looking for information that discusses the influence that the French Revolution has had on the rest of the world from the end of the 18th century to the present.*

[Legacies of the Revolution](#)

OR

[Health and hygiene in the 19th century](#) (if "Legacies" site does not work)

2.b. Respond to this statement. You have 3 minutes:

"This web resource has been judged to offer credible information that is appropriate for academic research. Find at least 3 reasons to show that this is true."

3. Discussion: Share reasons why this website is appropriate for research (why the information here can be trusted).

4. Presentation/discussion: Brainstorm and list various search terms from a topic sentence.

"The core concept of the French Revolution--the understanding that the masses have the same right to share society's wealth as the privileged few--is the legacy that has informed every subsequent movement for independence or democracy anywhere in the world."

- Think of key words or common expressions specific to the topic
- Think of synonyms:
- Think of the most important terms:
- Think of terms that might sometimes be too limiting:
- Use “...” for phrases, ANDs, ORs, and parenthesis to structure search

Sample search: ***French Revolution, effects, history,***

5. Practice: Search for a reliable research site, identifying the following information on this [FORM](#). The source does NOT have to be reliable; all that matters is evaluating it thoroughly.

For more information, see the attached Lesson Plan below.

Finding and Evaluating Open Web Sources: Student Notes

Evaluation Criteria for Web Sources

- Who** created it? Is this person (or organization) a qualified, reputable, expert? Is she **authoritative** (reliable)?
- What** is the information like? Is it **accurate**, giving complete **coverage**, well-written, well-organized? Does it cite its sources? Are those sources reliable?
- Where** is the information from? Where is the site stored? Remember that just having a page stored in a university does not mean the university backs your information.
- Why** was the information or site created? Was the goal to present information objectively in a balanced way? If it aims to convince, does it address different points of view? Do the presenters have an identifiable political, ideological, or commercial goal that might slant their information?
- When** was it created? Is it **current**? (sometimes currency/recent is not important)
- Conclusion**: reliable for your purpose? YES/NO?

Where do I find this information:

- Who** -- Look in and follow-up people and organizations in:
About / Contact / “byline” (credits) / bottom of page / sidebars /
- What** -- Read and analyze content information in:
Titles / Text / Citations and References
- Where** -- Look in and follow-up on site and organization information in:
About / Contact / URL / Domain name
- Why** -- Look in and follow-up on author, site, and organization information in:
Text

-When -- Look in:
bottom of page / sidebars / subtitle / “byline” (credits)

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