Knowing what’s real and fake

Today’s students have more information at their fingertips than ever before and this means the role of the teacher as a guide is more important than ever. Teachers can guide students in understanding that not all information is reliable or accurate, nor will all information be suitable for a particular research topic. Evaluating sources encourages students to think critically about the origin of information they reference. Whether they are using information from a book, website, or blog, the following are several general factors to consider.

**Author**
Is the information from a credible, reputable and trustworthy author? Information from sources written by experts, reviewed by an editorial process, or based on strong credible evidence are good sources to reference.

**Tips for evaluating the author:**
- **Credentials** – consider the credibility of a source by looking at the author’s credentials or the reputation of the organisation. Decode websites quickly by examining the URL extension. Extensions such as ‘.gov’, ‘.org’, and ‘.edu’ represent government agencies, organisations, and educational institutes.
- **Reviewed** – investigate who the publisher is and check whether they have an editorial or peer-review process. For example, organisations and government agencies produce publications approved by several people.
- **Fairness** – examine the information carefully to check whether the author is showing favouritism or prejudice for or against someone or something. If the content contains bias, only one point of view is being presented. Assess for bias by examining the purpose of an article or website. For example, is the author trying to sell or promote a product? Consider comparing the information to other reliable sources so that you can make an informed decision on whether bias is at play.

**Timeliness**
Is the information up to date or archived? Archived information sources can provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a historical topic. For example, sources of archived information may include newspaper articles from the Irish Newspaper Archive – bit.ly/ScoilnetINA, Irish Times Archive – bit.ly/ScoilnetITA, or video recordings from the RTÉ Archive – www.rte.ie/archives. Archived sources of information may work for history but not if you are researching a rapidly developing field.

**Tips for evaluating the timeliness:**
- **Books** – information in books is not always as current as the information online. If you are using books, try to reference the latest edition.
- **Websites** – check the publication date of the article or whether the article was revised since the publication date.

**World Book Online** – bit.ly/ScoilnetWB is a reliable up-to-date source of information for all students and teachers and is free to access in the Republic of Ireland through Scoilnet. World Book is reliable as it maintains an editorial advisory board composed of academics and practitioners who are experts in their fields to ensure the continued accuracy of content and articles. When you need fast, reliable information for homework, reports, or just a lingering question, World Book Online is the place to go.

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