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Pattern Recognition: How a Rhetorical Approach to Sources Can Transform Information Literacy Instruction

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Teach IFL 101

- Two credit, 15-week, core requirement for all students at York College of Pennsylvania
- After instruction, students still...
  - Chose inappropriate sources
  - Treated all types of sources as equivalent in quality and effectiveness
What is Context?

- Cosmopolitan
- Glamour
- Redbook
Genre Theory


- Genre as a Social Act
  - Language a community uses to accomplish specific tasks
  - Guidelines for participating within the culture/community/context
Patterns of Social Action
Credibility Cues

- Features or actions that build a case for/against a source’s credibility
  - Authority
  - Accuracy
  - Bias
- The use and meaning of these cues depends on the situation
Authority

- It’s a relationship
  - Without someone to recognize it, it doesn’t exist
- It’s a matter of degree
  - You can possess a little or a lot
- It’s relative to a particular sphere of interest
  - An authority in one field is not an authority in all
Accuracy

- Evidence builds...
  - Trust
  - Credibility
  - Context
Bias

- Selection and Omission
- Placement
- Headlines
- Photo/Graphic/Caption/Formatting
- Names and Titles
- Statistics
- Sources
- Word Choice and Tone

Media Awareness Network, Detecting Bias in the News
Information Types

- Scholarly
- Government
- Professional/Trade
- News
- Popular interest (Entertainment/fashion, gossip)
- Special interest/Opinion
- Unsubstantiated or Unaccredited Information

Adapted from Swanson, Teaching students about information..., Research Strategies (2005)
Continuum of Credibility

High-Quality

Low-Quality
Rhetorically Appropriate Choices

THE CREDIBLE HULK
You won't like me when I'm angry, because I always back up my rage with facts and documented sources.
CRAAP Test

- **Authority**: the source of the information
  - Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
  - Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?
  - What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?
  - What are the author's qualifications to write on the topic?
  - Is there contact information, such as a publisher or e-mail address?
  - Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source?

- **Accuracy**: the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content, and
  - Where does the information come from?
  - Is the information supported by evidence?
  - Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
  - Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
  - Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion?
  - Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors?

- **Purpose**: the reason the information exists
  - Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
  - Is the information fact? Opinion? Propaganda?
  - Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
  - Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?
Rhetorical Analysis

Institute For Historical Review
Organization of American Historians

"We all abhor, on both moral and scholarly grounds, the substantive arguments of the Institute for Historical Review. We reject their claims to be taken seriously as historians"

*Journal of American History 80(3), 1213*
Quality ≠ Value
A New Paradigm

- Identify and analyze how context influences the way individuals and/or groups create, control, and use information
  - Knows how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated (1.2.a)
  - Recognizes that knowledge can be organized into disciplines that influence the way information is accessed (1.2.b)
  - Identifies the purpose and audience of potential resources (1.2.d)
The Information Literate Student...

- Determines the nature and extent of the information needed
- Accesses need information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system
- Uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding information and information technology
Other Applications