Never Judge a Website by its Cover: A Mixed-Methods Investigation into the Effectiveness of a Tutorial on Lateral Reading

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Never Judge a Website by Its Cover: A Mixed-Methods Investigation into the Effectiveness of a Tutorial on Lateral Reading (ACRL 2023 Conference)

Introduction:
Lateral reading (LR) has become a common approach to teaching online source evaluation and an alternative to evaluation checklists (CRAAP test). This study investigated the pedagogical effectiveness of a LR tutorial among undergraduate students (n=97).

Lateral Reading & Evaluation Accuracy:
- Students’ use of lateral reading more than doubled (21.6% to 52.5%, +30.9%).
- Both at the start and at the end of the tutorial, roughly 80% of those who used lateral reading correctly identified a questionable source as such. Students’ abilities to correctly identify a source as lacking credibility modestly increased (+7.2%). This increase reflects the subset of students who did LR.

Evaluation Criteria:
The evaluation criteria of motivation/agenda were highly correlated with an accurate evaluation of a questionable source, while the evaluation criteria of domain and professional appearance were highly correlated with an inaccurate evaluation of a questionable source.

Main Takeaways:
- Lateral reading appears to be a more effective method for evaluating the credibility of questionable online sources than are more traditional checklist approaches.
- In this study many students who were introduced to LR quickly adopted and effectively used these strategies.
- Other students appeared to need more exposure and practice in order to effectively use LR. These students may need more time to unlearn the more traditional and less effective evaluation strategies that they have used in the past.
- Effective lateral reading is a complex skill that requires practice over time.

Access tutorial: go.rowan.edu/evaluating

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