Lateral Reading, Critical Thinking

Teaching Students To Evaluate Online Information Like the Pros

Jenny Dale (she/her/hers)
Georgia International Conference
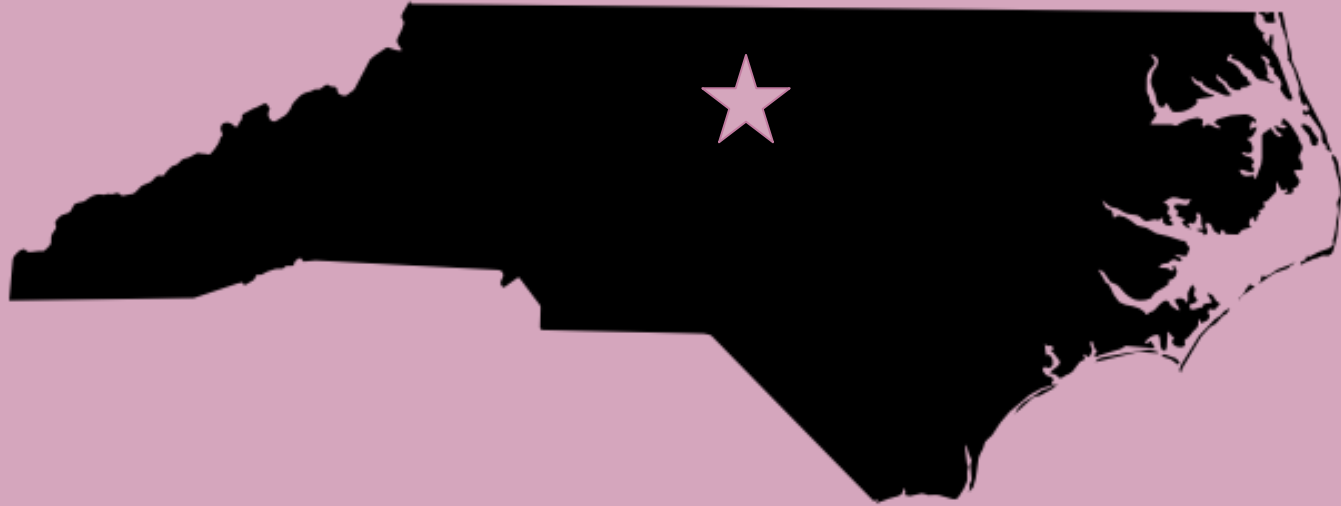on Information Literacy | 3/26/2021

Hello!

I'm Jenny Dale (she/her/hers) and I'm the Information Literacy Coordinator at UNC Greensboro University Libraries. I'm also a liaison librarian.

You can follow along with these slides at
**go.uncg.edu/gicoil2021lateral**

Land acknowledgement

North Carolina by Ted Grajeda from the Noun Project

Goals for this session

- Define lateral reading
- Compare lateral reading and vertical reading strategies for evaluating online information sources
- Engage in interactive activities focused on practicing lateral reading skills
- Consider opportunities for integrating lateral reading into your own teaching practice

But first, a poll!

Please answer two quick multiple choice questions at **www.menti.com** using the code **10 39 30 8** (or use the QR code → →)
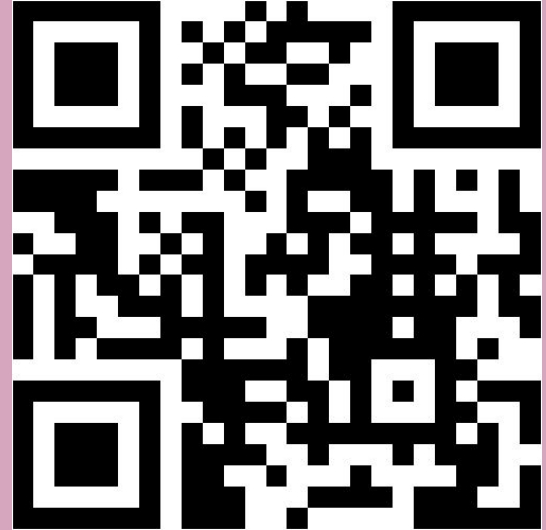
Results

Lateral reading

Background and context

My introduction to lateral reading

Mike Caulfield: How it started

Four moves
1. Check for previous work
2. Go upstream to the source
3. Read laterally
4. Circle back

The habit: Check your emotions

From *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers* (2017)

Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers

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Mike Caulfield: How it's going

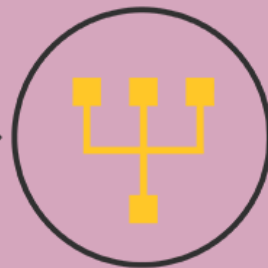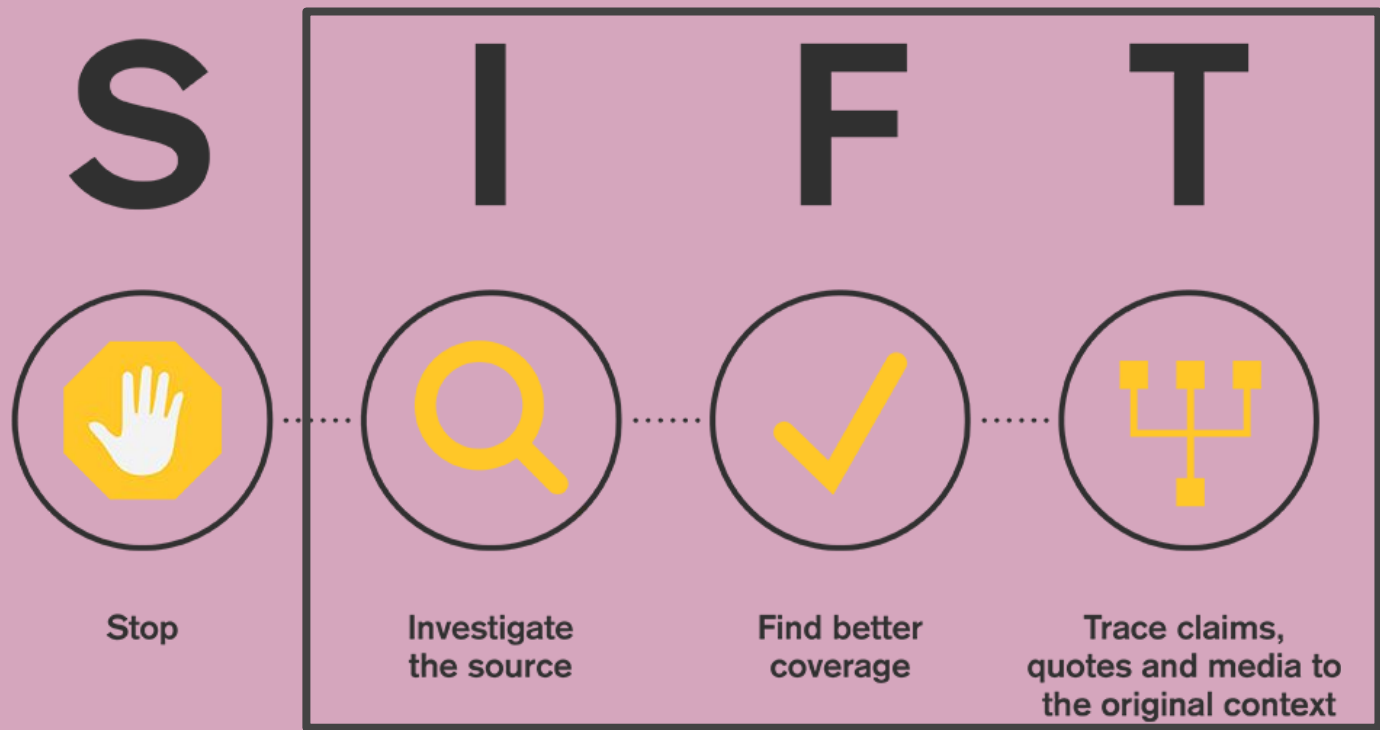# S   I   F   T

Stop **Investigate the source** **Find better coverage** **Trace claims, quotes and media to the original context**

(from Caulfield, 2019)

Mike Caulfield: How it's going

S **I** **F** **T**

Stop

Investigate the source

Find better coverage

Trace claims, quotes and media to the original context

(from Caulfield, 2019)

What *is* lateral reading?

Caulfield (2017, ch. 16):

- "...good fact-checkers read 'laterally,' across many connected sites instead of digging deep into the site at hand."
- "Lateral readers don't spend time on the page or site until they've first gotten their bearings by looking at what other sites and resources say about the source at which they are looking."

The research on lateral reading

The Stanford History Education Group

- "SHEG seeks to improve education by conducting research, working with school districts, and reaching directly into classrooms with free materials for teachers and students" ("About").
- Founder and Executive Director is Sam Wineburg, professor of Education and History at Stanford
- SHEG focuses on "civic online reasoning"

Wineburg & McGrew (2019)

"The purpose of this study was to investigate how experienced Internet users arrive at judgments of trustworthiness. We asked two main research questions: How do experienced users of the Internet arrive at judgments of credibility as they evaluate unfamiliar sites and investigate questions of social and political import? What strategies or heuristics do they use to efficiently find reliable information?..." (p. 5)

Wineburg & McGrew (2019)

"Based on other expert/novice research (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, & Hoffman, 2006), our hope in studying expertise was to distill a set of practices that can inform the development of curricula and assessment" (p. 5).

# Wineburg & McGrew (2019)

Research design:
- Three groups of Internet users: professional historians, Stanford undergraduates, and professional fact-checkers
- All participants completed six tasks related to online information evaluation
- Screen and audio recording software was used to capture the participants strategies

What did they learn?

Fact-checkers were the most effective and the most efficient group when it came to online source evaluation. Why? Because participants in this group "employed a powerful heuristic for taking bearings: *lateral reading*. Fact checkers almost immediately opened up a series of new tabs on the horizontal axis of their browsers before fully reading the article" (Wineburg & McGrew, 2019, p. 19).

Lateral reading vs. vertical reading

What's the difference?
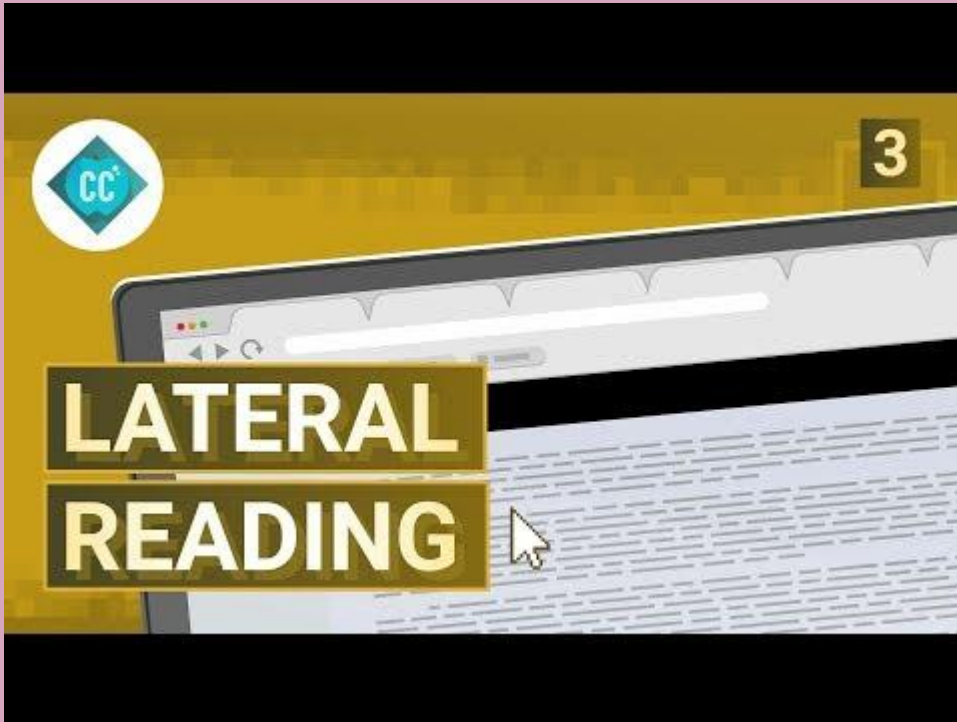
[Check Yourself with Lateral Reading: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #3](#)

Vertical reading & checklists

When describing the CRAAP method, Fielding (2019) writes:
"Students focus on the site itself, performing a 'deep dive' into what they find at a particular URL. As currently employed, the CRAAP method does not explicitly encourage leaving the site to place any content found there in a wider context…" (p. 620).

Vertical reading & checklists

"However, in recent years, the dissemination of mis- and disinformation online has become increasingly sophisticated and prolific, so restricting analysis to a single website's content without understanding how that site relates to a wider scope has the potential to facilitate the acceptance of misinformation as fact. Once a site is deemed 'credible,' all information on it is frequently trusted and taken at face value" (Fielding, 2019, p. 620).

Fielding's "informal trials"

"The simple shift to a lateral reading method not only visibly engaged students more thoroughly in the process, but also directly applied several of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education principles... In-class discussions around these concepts were often robust and student-driven, and frequently led to additional explorations of various websites. One student remarked they saw activity like 'detective work' and enjoyed that aspect of it" (Fielding, 2019, p. 621).

Another quick poll!

If you teach or have taught any checklist/acronym methods for source evaluation, head to www.menti.com and enter the code **6284 0634** to share which ones, or use the QR code to the right.

This is a judgment free zone!

My take

Both lateral and vertical reading matter for online source evaluation. Read laterally first, then go back to the source to engage with the actual content.

Interactive activities

Let's do this!

Setting the stage

Before I use any of the activities that follow in workshops, I typically:
- Talk with participants about their approaches to source evaluation
- Introduce Caulfield's Four Moves or SIFT approach
- Show a video that explains both lateral reading and vertical reading
- Describe the basic results of Wineburg & McGrew's research

A quick, large-group activity

SIFTing through social media

1. Stop.
2. **Investigate the source.**
3. **Find trusted coverage.**
4. Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context.

Example 1: Twitter

Head to **go.uncg.edu/curbside**

Take a look at the tweet and the linked source, then do some lateral reading. What can you find out about the company that posted this? Share any links you find by reading laterally in the chat. Remember - lateral reading means you're looking for information *about* the source that isn't *from* the source!

Example 2: Facebook

Head to **go.uncg.edu/fbgp**

Take a look at the post and the linked source, and then do a bit of lateral reading to "find trusted coverage." Has this company been covered by any of your preferred websites or news sources? Share links in the chat!

Low pressure option

Head to
go.uncg.edu/aclibrarians

Click the link in the form description and then do some lateral reading and submit a link about the site/publication via the form.

Small group activity comparing lateral and vertical reading

First, some notes

- If you're assigned to a vertical reading group, please resist the temptation to read laterally!
- You may already know a bit (or a lot) about the source you'll all be looking at. Try to put yourself in the mindset of a person who is unfamiliar with the source; don't just go with what you already know.
- This is a shortened version of the small-group activity I usually do in workshops, but it takes the same guided approach.

Let's try it!

Head to go.uncg.edu/smallgrouplr and keep that Google folder up on your device.

When you're placed in a breakout room, select the document that corresponds to your room number.
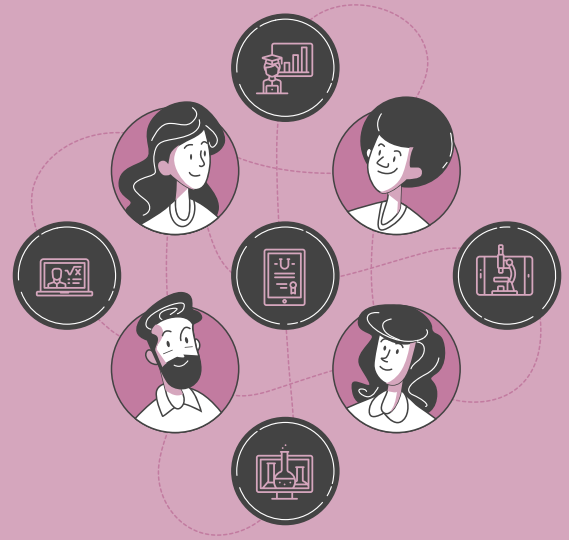
Debrief

What did you learn by reading vertically?

What did you learn by reading laterally?

Why read laterally?

"Lateral reading helps the reader understand both the perspective from which the site's analyses come and if the site has an editorial process or expert reputation that would allow one to accept the truth of a site's facts" (Caulfield, 2017, ch. 16).

Lateral reading resources to share with learners

Resources

- Google/DuckDuckGo
- Wikipedia (really!)
- Fact-checking websites
  - Snopes (wide coverage)
  - Factcheck.org (political focus, though they have added a "SciCheck" feature)
  - Duke Reporters' Lab database of global fact-checking sites
- I usually share a course LibGuide if applicable!
  - Here's an example: https://uncg.libguides.com/sift

Lateral reading & your teaching practice

Where could you integrate these concepts/activities?

Where have I taught lateral reading?

- In course-integrated library instruction for:
  - English 101
  - Freshman Seminar: Lies the Internet Told Me...
  - Classical Art of Persuasion
  - Media Writing
  - Gender and Media Culture
  - Spanish Composition
- For a co-curricular "Civic Engagement Academy"
- In workshops for colleagues (Development officers, library colleagues, instructors)

Take a moment to reflect

Can you think of a class, workshop series, program, or other opportunity that would lend itself well to teaching lateral reading with interactive activities? Make a note to yourself of any ideas that come to mind!

Please share!

If you're willing to share the class or opportunity you came up with, please feel free to do that in the Zoom chat!

Free online teaching and learning resources

- Lesson plans and activities
  - Try searching https://sandbox.acrl.org/ or https://www.projectcora.org/
  - "Teaching Lateral Reading" from SHEG https://cor.stanford.edu/curriculum/collections/teaching-lateral-reading
- Online courses
  - Sorting Truth From Fiction: Civic Online Reasoning (EdX)
  - Check, Please! Starter Course (Mike Caulfield)

Sites/sources I often use

- Articles from https://immigrationimpact.com/ (sponsored by the American Immigration Council)
  - Can be useful to compare to sources that come from https://www.fairus.org/ (Federation for American Immigration Reform)
- Sites that Wineburg & McGrew used in their research, like https://minimumwage.com/, https://www.aap.org/, https://www.acpeds.org/
- Think tanks non-profits, and other advocacy organizations, like https://www.americanprogress.org/, https://www.heritage.org/, https://www.aclu.org/, https://www.cato.org/, https://www.brennancenter.org/, and more!

THANK YOU!

Please feel free to contact me at
jedale2@uncg.edu!

Slides link:
https://go.uncg.edu/gicoil2021lateral

Small group activity folder
https://go.uncg.edu/smallgrouplr

References

Caulfield, M. (2017). *Web literacy for student fact-checkers*. Self-published. https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/

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