

Vignette Example

Goal 3: Language learners effectively use and critically evaluate technology-based tools as aids in the development of their language learning competence as part of formal instruction and for further learning.

Standard 4: Language learners use and evaluate available technology-based research tools appropriately.

Performance indicators

- Language learners employ technology to locate and collect information from a variety of sources.
- Language learners employ strategies to evaluate online information.
- Language learners document source material appropriately.
- Language learners determine which technology tools to use to organize information from research (e.g., moving information around in the word processor, using a database or spreadsheet).

Learner Goal 3 Standard 4 Vignette: Evaluating Web Sources

Learner profile: Adults, ages 17+, Developing/Low Advanced (Level 3, B1)

Context: Intensive English Program (IEP) reading–writing class at a North American university

Focus: Students practice critical thinking while reading resources on the Internet and writing research papers.

Background

Students in a college IEP setting come from various countries, but this is their first experience in the United States. They have some competencies in analyzing the credibility of a text, but these vary, depending on their prior learning. During class discussion, students are given a short time to critically analyze print items representing a spectrum of reliability, such as *The Washington Post* and *The National Enquirer*. They discuss which is a good news source and which is not, and start a checklist of criteria. Students in groups are then given copies of the *New York Post*, *USA Today*, and *The New York Times* and continue to work on their criteria. Then the class comes together and discusses the criteria and what makes a good resource. (For more on search strategies, see Google for Educators: Google Web Search, Google, 2010c, http://www.google.com/educators/p_websearch.html.)

In a subsequent session, students compare printouts of several web pages, some from sources similar to those above and some from less reliable sources, such as extremist groups or groups with vested commercial interests. Using the criteria they have created, students decide in groups whether particular sites are reliable or not. The class then comes together and discusses what is important about evaluating websites, as compared to print resources. Discussion includes points such as what the domain names mean (.org, .edu, .gov, .com, and others), who owns a site (private individual, research institute, school district, etc.), whether hyperlinks are active, time stamps of last updates to the website, the amount of advertisement on a given site, whether the

site is copyrighted, and whether a contact can easily be found. Students learn how to find out who owns a site (e.g., at easyDNS, 2010,, <http://www.easywhois.com>) and look at previous versions of the site at the Internet Archive: WayBackMachine (Internet Archive, 2010; <http://www.archive.org>). Printouts or screenshots of results from these sites are shared with the class. Students also look at what sites are linked to and from the site they are evaluating, and discuss what this implies about the site's reliability. In groups, students continue to develop their checklists to include website evaluation comparable to their ideas for evaluating texts. Then they use the new criteria to examine websites within the framework of the technology access they have. Students make their own paper copies of the reliability criteria the class devises, and keep their copies with them as they access the Internet when they are doing research. The teacher gives them a handout with appropriate referencing formats, which they discuss during the course of their research so that sources will be accurately cited. Papers are written using a word processor at the lab or on a home computer or laptop. Students include a checklist whenever they turn in a research paper, indicating how well their Internet resources met the criteria. (For more on web page validity, see Davis, Ferenz, & Gray, 2010.)

Technology Tasks

Low-resource, low-access setting:

With one computer in the classroom and access to the IEP lab on campus outside of class, students will work from print copies of the newspapers and news magazines. Printouts from websites are also used for discussion. Students in small groups accessing the computer will use website and link searches to discover additional ways to evaluate documents found on the Internet.

Medium-resource, medium-access setting:

With several computers and adequate access to the Internet, all resources are electronic, including online versions of the newspapers and news magazines. Students group around the computers to do the activities and keep an electronic document with their search criteria available on the desktop.

High-resource, high-access setting:

With one computer per student and broadband access in a networked lab with a course management system (CMS), students begin with the assessment of paper documents to develop their criteria, as described, but they then work on their own computers and are grouped electronically within the CMS to develop a group list. During the project, students communicate via text chat or video/audio chat within the CMS and collaborate through a wiki or with language lab software as they develop their checklists. With a CMS, students can keep the electronic list on display in the chat as they work. The teacher can "look in" on their chat and view a transcript of their interactions to ensure that all students are participating fully. (For more on electronic grouping, see Liang, 2010.)