Information Literacy Fundamentals Session 1 – video script

Hello everyone! I am Mr. Davies, and I am the Library Director here at UNM-Los Alamos. In this video, I will be talking about some fundamental concepts relating to searching, finding, and evaluating information in a variety of print and online formats.

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When you need information for any purpose, it's important to understand what the need is, how much information is required to meet that need, what the best sources of information are to meet that need, and where and how to find the information. And, perhaps most

importantly, you need to understand how to evaluate the information for reliability, accuracy, and credibility.

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So for example, if you need a recipe for tonight's dinner, it's simply a matter of deciding what you want to eat, knowing where to find a good recipe (either your own recipe file, a recipe book, or searching Google), and then choosing a recipe that looks good, and will work for how much time and effort you have or want to put into getting the ingredients and preparing the dish.

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More relevant to what you're learning here, you will have to complete assignments of different lengths, for a

variety of purposes, meeting certain criteria as

determined by your instructors. These will require

varying amounts of information, using a variety of

formats of information that may exist in a variety of

places, and that are found in a variety of ways.

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For these assignments, evaluating the information

will require more effort than what you would put out

deciding on a recipe for tonight's dinner. Additionally,

you then have to assimilate the information you find to

make it your own, and then properly give credit to the

creators of the information by citing the sources.

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As you begin the process, it will probably be tempting to just go to Google and try to find everything you need on the Internet. And, that is understandable because a Google search of the Internet is easy and convenient. But Google and the Internet are just one tool, and not everything can be found on the Internet, and even more importantly, not all information found is reliable, credible, or even accurate.

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For some purposes, searching Google may be perfectly adequate and appropriate. However, for many other purposes, especially those associated with

information needed for completing course assignments, or for professional purposes, Google alone is probably not going to be adequate. As a result, you will need to know where and how to discover other sources of reliable and appropriate information.

And, to that end, I will be talking about available formats of information, both print and online.

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In today's world of information, all of the things that have traditionally been published in a printed format have the POTENTIAL to be accessed online. However, the reality is that much of what is in print is NOT online, and in fact, a lot of new information is still being

published only in print. Many sources that are now available online certainly have their benefits, yet many others come with significant challenges.

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Books, of course, are perhaps the oldest most accessible information format, which continue to be published in print or online as eBooks. Some titles are published in both formats. Print books, of course can be found in bookstores, in libraries, and ordered or purchased from a variety of retail businesses.

E-books can be purchased and downloaded onto a computer or tablet. Most academic eBooks that you may need to access for research purposes, are available in

libraries by searching the online catalog, Google Books,
Google Scholar, and other databases.

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Reference sources, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases are great for finding quick answers to questions, or for gathering background information on a topic. These materials can be a good starting place in the research process. Reference sources are readily found in libraries in print and/or online. They can be located through the online catalog as well as online reference databases. Additionally, search engines like Google, allow you to find, to give one example,

definitions of words through open access online dictionaries.

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Newspapers, magazines, and journals, collectively called "periodicals" are available both in print and online. These formats of information are probably the most beneficial and usable as online documents. I will be talking more about these shortly.

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The Internet or "web" is familiar to all of you, and I will be talking about it in more depth later as well.

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Media resources, such as audio recordings, video recordings, and photographs can also be found in both print and online. They are readily available for purchase, for downloading, and they are accessible through free online services, paid online services, and online library catalogs. These materials, especially audio recordings, are more and more, becoming available almost exclusively online.

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A "periodical" is anything that is published regularly and periodically (meaning daily, weekly, monthly,

quarterly, and so forth), such as newspapers, magazines, and professional and academic journals.

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When using information in magazines and journals, it is important to understand the difference between the two types. Magazines are a format for providing information that generally appeals to a wide and diverse audience. Magazine articles, such as those found in *People, Rolling Stone, Sports Illustrated, or Time,* are typically written by journalists or free-lance writers who are not necessarily experts in the topics they write about. The writing style tends to be informal, informative and often entertaining. The publication process is "editorial,"

meaning that submitted articles go before one or more editors who work for the publication, before they are published.

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In academic and professional fields, information found in journals provides the most current and reliable information available. The process for publishing articles in journals is typically faster than it is for publishing a book. The science and medicine professions particularly rely on journal articles for current information almost exclusively.

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Academic and Professional journals are formats for providing information within a specific field or profession. These types of articles ARE written by experts in a particular field or profession, and the intended audience is individuals in that profession or individuals who are interested in or are learning about that profession. These articles are scholarly, formal, and often full of terminology used in the field. The publication process is "peer-reviewed" or "refereed," meaning that before an article is published, it goes before a panel of other experts in the particular field, who review it for accuracy, logical methodology,

relevance, and whether or not it would be a worthy contribution to the field.

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There is a handout in your packet that provides more details about the differences between magazines and journals.

In most cases, you will need to use professional and academic journal articles for course assignments rather than magazine articles.

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The Internet or "web," for our purposes here, can be divided into two broad categories: the "visible" web and the "invisible" web. The "visible" web consists of sites that are

generally available to anyone at no cost (except of course, for "paid" business sites that charge users to access the site content). "Visible" websites are generally found using a search engine such as Google.

The "invisible" web consists primarily of searchable databases to find information contained in those databases. Private companies, educational institutions, and libraries have paid subscriptions to the databases, which are then made available for use by employees, students, faculty, or the general public who visit those companies or institutions. These databases and the information in them, cannot be accessed through Google, and the web simply functions as a gateway to the databases. And, even though the databases have graphical user interfaces that make them look like "websites," the

documents contained in them are not really considered web resources.

Information found through the "visible" web has a number of challenges that are not obvious. And, "visible" web information should be thoroughly evaluated before it is used for academic, professional, or life and death-related purposes.

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Why? The visible web is not refereed or monitored in any way, and as a result, anyone can put information up on the web. Just because it is there does not mean that it is accurate or reliable.

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To some extent, all information resources should be evaluated using the CRAAP test. Resources from the "visible"

web particularly need to be thoroughly evaluated in this way.

The CRAAP acronym refers to Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose.

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Currency refers to the timeliness of the information.

Questions to consider in this evaluation step are:

- When was the information published or posted?

- Has the information been revised or updated?

- Is the currency of the information important for your topic?

- Is the information current or out-of-date for your topic? AND

- If it is an online resource, are the links working?

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Relevance refers to the importance of the information to your topic. Questions to consider are:

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?

- Who is the intended audience?

- Is the information at an appropriate level for your purposes?

- Have you looked at other resources before choosing this one? AND

- Would you be comfortable using this resource to complete a research paper or project?

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Authority refers to the actual source or creator of the information. Questions to consider in this step are:

- Who is the author, publisher, source, organization, or sponsor?

- Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations provided?

- What are the author's credentials or affiliations?

- Is there contact information for the author, organization or publisher? AND

- In the case of web resources, does the web address or URL reveal anything about the source? In other words, is it a .com (commercial) site, a .edu (educational) site, a .gov (government) site, a .org (nonprofit organization) site, or a .net (network) site?

I will be talking about these distinctions in more depth shortly.

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Accuracy refers to the reliability, truthfulness and correctness of a resource's content.

Questions to consider in this part of the evaluation are:

- What is the origin of the information?

- Is it supported by evidence?

- Is it from a source that has been peer-reviewed or refereed?

- Can it be verified in another source or from your own personal knowledge?

- Is there a bibliography or works cited list included?

- Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion? AND

- Are there spelling, grammar, or typographical errors?

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Purpose refers to why the information exists.

Questions to consider are:

- What is the purpose of the information? To inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade?

- Do the authors or sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?

- Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?

- Does the point of view appear to be objective and impartial? AND

- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases? If so, are they

appropriate to the context of the resource and for your purposes?

While it is not always necessary to have favorable responses to ALL of the CRAAP test questions, it is important to determine which questions best apply to the resource being evaluated and have favorable responses to the most important ones.

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There is a CRAAP Test form in the handouts that accompany this video that can be used to evaluate websites in particular.

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Here are a few shortcuts to finding typically authoritative and accurate websites:

- Check the domain name extension in the URLs, which are again, .com, .net, .edu, .gov, .org.

  o Sites with .edu, .gov, and .org extensions are generally more trustworthy sites; however, they still require some degree of evaluation.

- Use links established on library and university websites, reputable company sites, and reputable non-profit organization sites.

- Use links to websites in online catalogs and other reputable online sources such as *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*.

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Here are some important points regarding the challenges in using information on the "visible" web that I mentioned earlier.

- There is a common misconception that information on the web is a replacement for traditional (print) information sources. It is not. Not everything can be found on the web. Remember that the web and search engines such as Google are just one tool for finding information.

- The web is not well organized, and information on the web is not cataloged on the web.

- Search engines like Google, by default, function using full-text keyword searches, potentially resulting in a long list of results, and lots of irrelevant sites in the list of results.

- Information can be updated at any point in time, requiring that the date of access be included when citing web resources.

- Web addresses (or URLs) can change at any time.

- And, pages or entire sites can be removed without warning.

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When evaluating resources and information, in most cases, you can assume that materials in academic library collections and that peer-reviewed academic and professional journal articles are authoritative and accurate; therefore, you probably only need to evaluate library materials for relevance, purpose, and in some

cases, how current they are, depending on the subject matter.

Web resources, however, must be thoroughly evaluated for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy and purpose.

If you have questions or concerns about a resource during the evaluation process, check with your instructor or a librarian. They will be able to help you evaluate a resource based on the focus of your topic.

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The following is a demonstration, evaluating a website about Edgar Allan Poe. The URL is also indicated

in your packet if you would like to examine the site on your own.

    While this is only one evaluation, it is a good example of how to approach evaluating any website.

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Poe Decoder site evaluation

    This website, "Qrisse's Edgar Allan Poe Pages," is a .com website meaning you will have to do a thorough evaluation of this site.

    You can assume that because of the "/Qrisse" in the URL, that these pages are a sub-category of a larger site, which may need to be explored and evaluated as well.

There are lots of links and information about Edgar Allan Poe, but we don't yet know how authoritative and reliable this information is.

On the side, there are a number of links to various pages by this web author about Edgar Allan Poe.

In the middle, you can see there are a lot of links to information about Poe himself.

Looking through this page, nothing is visible so far that tells anything about the author of the site.

If you scroll to the bottom it shows when the site was last updated, which, as you can see was fairly recently, so we at least know that the site is still active.

To do a thorough evaluation of this site, you should explore any of the links on the side that might take you to more information about the author of the site or that might provide a list of resources he consulted to create the site.

For the sake of brevity, I will take you through the links I found that produced important information. I'm going to click on the "Poe Decoder" link. Looking at this page, scrolling to the bottom, I can see a link to Christopher Halqvist, which takes you to his personal page. If you click on "About Me" here in the side menu, it will take you to a page of biographical information about him.

Underneath the set of photos showing him with long hair, there is a statement that provides information about his education and his interest in Edgar Allan Poe. While he is clearly brilliant given the subject areas he studied, it only says that he has an interest in Poe, so his level of knowledge and expertise is not clear to us at this point.

Back at the author's pages, having explored all the links, I have determined that there is little to no evidence to support the information in these pages. You will be able to see more details about this when we look at the completed CRAAP Test Form for this website.

Going back to the "Poe Decoder" site, I am interested in any of the information about the site, the contributors, and by or about Christopher Halqvist specifically.

And there is indeed a statement about the purpose of the website and the Poe Decoder group. They specify that accuracy of information is very important to the purpose of this site.

There are links to what appear to be essays about a number of different works by Poe, which I will come back to in a moment.

There is a link to Qrisse's pages which is the sub-site that I started with, and it also includes a statement about what is included in his pages.

Further down on the page, there is a clear copyright statement for the website as well as the essays in the website.

Going back up to the menu of essays, I will look at the essay about Poe's poem *The Raven*, which is by Christopher Halqvist himself.

At the top, there is a more definitive statement about his qualifications, as well as a specific copyright statement about this essay.

There are also links to specific sections of the essay and a works cited list, which is very important.

Skimming through the essay, it is clear that it is a critical essay about the poem, which could be very useful in the context of an analysis paper about *The Raven.*

Clicking on the works cited link, I can see what resources were consulted in writing this essay.

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Bonus Web evaluation introduction

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Bonus web demonstration

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Here is the completed CRAAP Test Form for the Poe website that was just evaluated. I will point out a few of the more important observations in the evaluation.

Under Currency, you can see that Qrisse's pages were recently updated, but the overall Poe Decoder site was last updated in 2001. In the context of literature, however, having more up-to-date information is not as critical as it would be for other topics such as science and medicine.

Relevance, of course, will be up to each individual person to determine. In the context of finding critical

information about Poe and his works, this site is very relevant.

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Regarding authority, it was determined that the website author is not academically credentialed as an expert on Poe, but he is definitely an enthusiast who has significantly studied Poe and his works on his own.

Under accuracy, you can see some inconsistencies in the presence of evidence and source citations, but those things are present for some of the more important features of the site, especially the critical essays in the larger "Poe Decoder" site.

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The Purpose is clearly stated in the larger Poe Decoder website, and it was determined that it is meant to inform and provides unbiased objective facts.

Under Other observations I indicated that the website has a very dated appearance. Having said that though, it is not a deal breaker with respect to the quality of the information in the website overall. The website would, however, be more likely to receive more attention with an updated appearance.

Overall, I concluded that the website passed the CRAAP Test, especially when considered in connection

with the larger Poe Decoder site, which definitely has excellent critical essays on some of Poe's works.

And, as seen in the bonus evaluation demonstration of the website that no longer exists, the Poe Decoder site is extremely authoritative and accurate.