Informational Writing: What is social media, and how does it affect young people?

This ten lesson mini unit challenges students to think critically about social media through reading and composing informational text. Students will demonstrate what they have learned by creating a magazine or ‘zine’ about social media, a topic that they are familiar with. Students with access to technology may use Canva to create their zine and students who are unplugged may use images from magazines, white paper, plastic sheet covers, and a 1 inch. binder to create their zine.

For more information about teaching informational writing, The New York Times offers a video on Teaching Informational Writing as part of their writing webinar series.

NOTE: This learning plan uses specific texts (e.g., written, performed, illustrated) however, these texts are not endorsements. The selection of classroom texts is completely a local decision and subject to local approval processes.

Informational Writing: Select, Explore, and Develop Topic/Fact Check
(read/annotate/take notes)

This fourth lesson continues students’ exploration of credible sources and consideration of the various (and scary) ways facts can be manipulated. Students select a topic and use their sleuthing skills to learn more about their selected topic; they complete a credibility checklist to formatively check the veracity of their sources in preparation of the continued process.

NOTE: This learning plan uses specific texts (e.g., written, performed, illustrated) as concrete examples of standards-based learning activities. These texts are not endorsements. The selection of classroom texts is completely a local decision and subject to local approval processes.
Learning Target | Lesson “Small Make(s)” | Unit “Big Make”
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• I can **examine** complex ideas about social media.  
• I can **differentiate** between fact and opinion in a complex text.  
• I can **identify** facts about social media and its effects on young people. | • Topic Questions & Facts  
• Credible Source Checklist | • Students will independently create their own **multi-genre magazine article or ‘zine’** to distribute information about a topic of their choice.  
• **Rubric**  
• **Exemplar**

*adapted from Cris Tovani’s *Why Do I Have to Read This? Literacy Strategies to Engage our Most Reluctant Readers* (2021)

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**Standard Alignment**

**ELAGSE9-10W2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

b. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.

**WIDA English Language Development Standards for English learners (ELs):**

Teachers of ELs are encouraged to use the resources in the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition, to design language expectations (p.28) specific to the GSE. Examples of the English language needed to support informational writing can be found on pp. 186-187.
Instructional Design

For more information regarding daily routine practices and/or additional information on the unit framework (including materials), please see the Informational Writing Unit Overview.

Various evidence-based practices (EBPs) are identified throughout the lesson below; however, we believe good teaching can be eclectic, “...thoughtfully, intentionally taking some of the best of different teaching methodologies, while always holding onto some research-based, core beliefs, we can help our students flourish in ways that teaching only one way will not” (Roberts, 2018, p. 6). Always feel free to adapt the lesson to meet your professional needs with your specific student population. Ideas for student supports and enrichments can be found in the “Student Learning Supports” section.

This mini unit is written for synchronous distance learning or face-to-face learning that utilizes various technology resources. Everything listed as synchronous can be utilized with little to no change in a face-to-face (f2f) environment. However, guidance is provided for modifications, including ideas for supporting students who are learning asynchronously and those with little or no access to technology (unplugged / offline).

Materials
Teacher—virtual whiteboard (shared document),
Students—reader & writer's notebooks, digital or physical annotation tools, Informational Writing: Lesson Four Handout (Unplugged), Lesson Four Research & Checklist

Engage

Opening: Whole-group discussion. [Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning [Moderate evidence] (Kamil, et al., 2008)].

Synchronous and Asynchronous

Ask students to review their brainstorming fact lists from the day before and to select the topic they feel a) they have the strongest research to develop, and/or b) the topic they feel most passionate about and would like to learn more. Give students a few moments to engage in the work, and they can share their topic selection with a partner to increase investment in the work. Then, you can review the definitions below to help students select relevant and sufficient facts in their research.
### Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>is non-fiction writing that includes biographies, reports,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>newspaper articles, magazine articles, expository essays etc. that is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primarily factual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible source</td>
<td>a researcher or website that is known and respected for providing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>truthful and concise information. (Wikipedia is not an acceptable source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>because anyone can alter/edit information on the page without oversight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>a subject and focus of a body of writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unplugged/Offline

1. Have students complete Part I of the Informational Writing: Lesson Four Handout (Unplugged).
2. If possible, try to find a way to communicate with students about their thoughts and to provide feedback (even if it is via phone call or Google Voice).

### Explore

**EBP: Integrate writing and reading to emphasize key writing features.** [Moderate Evidence] (Graham et al., 2016); **EBP: Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction.** [Strong Evidence] (Kamil et al., 2008).

**Asynchronous & Synchronous**

Lead a discussion with students centered around the question, “What makes a source superficially seem credible?”

A way to provoke thought is by showing the 1957 BBC April Fool’s Day hoax video (without letting them know it was a hoax): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVo_wkxH9dU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVo_wkxH9dU)

- What makes the video seem credible?
- What ways do they try to convince you that the spaghetti harvest is real?
- What clues you into the fact that it is not real?

In the modern world where things like deep fakes exist, how do you determine the credibility of a text? If you want a more modern resource for additional thought, you could show this short clip from ABC news regarding Jordan Peele’s President Obama Deepfake: [https://youtu.be/bE1KWpoX9Hk](https://youtu.be/bE1KWpoX9Hk). [Trigger warning: Discusses Parkland Shooting Deepfake].

Review the list below for students to utilize as they continue researching their chosen topic.
**Directions:** As students are researching and adding onto their brainstorming document, they should fact check using the criteria below. Check off each one you complete.

- I selected a topic I am interested in.
- I researched the credentials of the author who wrote the information about my topic to determine their credibility.
- The author is a researcher, columnist, professor, educator, etc.
- I selected facts from researchers or websites that are credible.
- All my sources were written within the last 5-7 years. (Look for date)
- I made sure that I found multiple sources that agree on a fact.
- I have an idea about how I could present my information in at least two informational genres (with magazine article being the main one).

**Unplugged/Offline**

1. Have students complete Part II of the *Informational Writing: Lesson Four Handout (Unplugged)*.
2. If possible, try to find a way to communicate with students about their thoughts and to provide feedback (even if it is via phone call or Google Voice).

**Apply**

*EBP: Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning. [Moderate Evidence] (Kamil et al., 2008); EBP: Ask deep explanatory questions. [Strong Evidence] (Pashler et al., 2007).*

**Synchronous & Asynchronous**

**Catch and Release**

Now that topics have been finalized, have students continue their research, using the checklist as a guide to ensure credible information is being gathered.

Students can use [this lesson four document](#) to record their facts and sources, and also to complete the checklist in the next phase.

**Unplugged/Offline**

1. Have students complete Part III of the *Informational Writing: Lesson Four Handout (Unplugged)*.
2. If possible, try to find a way to communicate with students about their thoughts and to provide feedback (even if it is via phone call or Google Voice).
Reflect

EBP: Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation. [Moderate Evidence] (Kamil et al., 2008).

Synchronous and Asynchronous

Ask students to complete the checklist on the Lesson Four Document if they have not already done so. If they cannot check a box, then ask them what their next steps should be. Now reflect on what they found and determine their next steps to connect ideas. They should also use this time to jot down their lingering questions (there will be a handout accompanied with this assignment for unplugged students.)

Unplugged/Offline

1. Have students complete Part IV of the Informational Writing: Lesson Four Handout (Unplugged).
2. If possible, try to find a way to communicate with students about their thoughts and to provide feedback (even if it is via phone call or Google Voice).

Evidence of Student Success

Students will independently create their own magazine or ‘zine’ to distribute information about social media and its effects on young people. This will serve as the evidence-based deliverable.

Formative Assessment:

- Research Facts and Sources Checklist

Formative Assessment

“More of What’s Meaningful”: Formative Assessments (Serravallo, 2013)

Formative assessment can occur in two ways:

- Conferring [Guidance: Tips for Conferring to Maximize Student Engage]
  “Supercharge your Conferring: Focus on Goals, Strategies, and Feedback” (Serravallo, 2018)
- Sharing [“How to Create an Inclusive Virtual Classroom” (Kern, 2020)]
  “8 Strategies to Improve Participation in Your Virtual Classroom” (Minero, 2020)
Student Learning Supports

At all levels, the English Language Arts standards encourage students to become critical thinkers and communicators. The following strategies, though not exhaustive, are designed to support students struggling to meet this lesson's learning target, and/or learning English as an additional language, and/or are exceeding and would benefit from enrichment.

Supports/Scaffolding

- **Conceptual Processing**: Allow additional processing time. Review this content prior to the lesson occurring so that the student will have additional time to formulate responses. Summarize each lesson segment and keep summary accessible for students. Implement scaffolds identified below for various circumstances.

- **Language**: Prior to beginning of the lesson, explicitly teach vocabulary required to engage with the content. [EBP: Explicit vocabulary instruction [strong] (Kamil, et al., 2008)].

- **Visual-spatial Processing**: Provide opportunities for students to engage with visual representations and/or manipulatives (virtual or concrete) as they explore topics for informational text.

- **Organization**: Maintain logical progression of big ideas/lesson segments in the course’s shared virtual space so that students can revisit lesson segments as necessary. Help students bookmark frequently utilized sites (such as Canva) or how to group tabs in Chrome to assist with organization.

- **Memory**: Maintain logical progression of big ideas/lesson segments in the course’s shared virtual space so that students can revisit lesson segments, as necessary.

**Scaffolds**

- If students struggle (especially in the virtual world), you could do a guided small group or one-on-one session in a break-out room to use your expertise and provide intensive supports (High-leverage practice).

- Incorporate positive feedback to recognize what students have done well with their writing (High-leverage practice).

- The number of facts can be easily modified

- Meet with students to be sure they understand the topics. Model asking questions and researching the additional facts for each topic as appropriate for the student’s level of need. EBP: Explicitly teach appropriate writing strategies using a Model-Practice-Reflect instructional cycle. [Strong Evidence] (Graham et al., 2016).

- Model using the checklist on the facts from the first day of research. EBP: Explicitly teach appropriate writing strategies using a Model-Practice-Reflect instructional cycle. [Strong Evidence] (Graham et al., 2016).
• Partner work can also be utilized. Students could review the checklist and their research findings with a partner.

Supports for English learners:
• Suggestions for this lesson include but are not limited to: providing students with anchor chart to guide process of determining credibility of source (example from Beer and Probst here (2017); anchor chart should be modified to reflect process/checklist that all students are expected to complete), allowing students to utilize credible sources in first language to identify facts, etc.
• Educators may find it valuable to review WIDA’s Proficiency Level Descriptors (pp. 210-211) when planning for differentiation based on students’ levels of English proficiency.
• Teachers of ELs are encouraged to incorporate high leverage practices for teaching EL students and to utilize relevant evidence-based strategies such as those found in Project EXCELL’s downloadable GO TO Strategies (Levine et al., 2013).

Acceleration/Extension
Standard:

ELAGSE9-10W8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Acceleration/Extension Activity:
• Students could also attempt to find example(s) of not credible, biased, or ridiculous sources to share with the class as exemplars for what you don’t want when researching. Then, allow these students a window of time to present the non-examples to the class and explain their rationale for choosing them. This could be combined with a support for a struggling student to have them engage in partnering to show and explain non-examples. EBP: Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation. [Moderate Evidence] (Kamil et al., 2008).
Engaging Families

Aligning with your district’s family engagement plan to facilitate the most meaningful way to work with your families. At the secondary level, much of the communication occurs with the student serving as a liaison.

- Have students engage their family in a fake news media literacy quiz (if they Google, a number of these quizzes are available).
- Alternatively, students can ask their families one wild thing they heard from someone, then they can attempt to check the veracity of the story using their new research skills (or even going to [Snopes](https://www.snopes.com) as a first stop)!
- Families of English learners can practice identifying credibility of sources together by listening to the news or reading articles in their first language.

References


