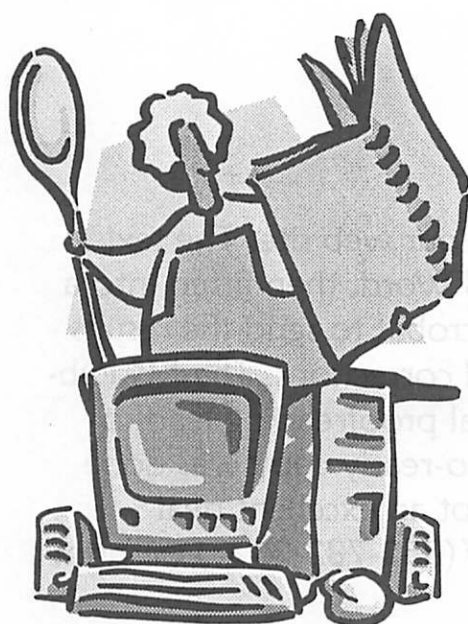


Recipes

for



Wired Teachers

practical ideas by teachers for teachers
organized through the
Japan Association of Language Teaching
Computer Assisted Language Learning
Special Interest Group

edited by Kevin Ryan



Message from the editor

This book was actually fun to put together. The best part was exchanging ideas with people in the field for whom I have tremendous respect. Thanks go to the authors who selflessly contributed their ideas. Thanks for Larry Davies and Patricia Thornton for being humorous enough to think up the title. A special thanks to Elin Melchior for proofreading this book under tight time constraints. The mistakes she didn't find are ultimately my responsibility.

The only question left is, "Who is going to do Recipes 2?" It even rhymes.

How this book got made

Authors sent their work by email or through our web site. The text was checked for grammar and spelling in MS Word, then fitted into a template in MS Publisher. We used Adobe Acrobat to send the results back to authors for their final comments and corrections. The MS Publisher files were updated and assembled. Final proofreading lead to another round of corrections. The final photo-ready copy was done on an Epson laser printer at the office. We got an excellent deal through the *Chubu Nihon Kyouiku Bunkakai* (052-782-2323) on printing. Talk to Kani-san there.

Copyright stuff

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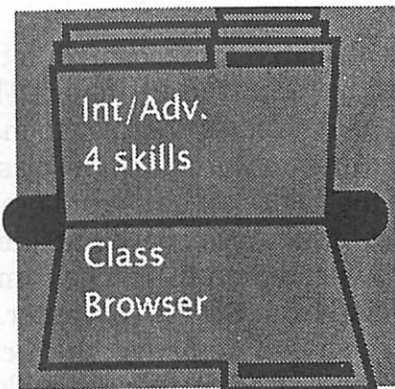
JALT CALL SIG has other books

Conference proceedings came out the same week as this book did. Previously, 2 other collections of articles were edited by Paul Lewis. You can buy these books through our web site.

A Web of Deceit

Evaluating the 'trustworthiness' of information on the Web

Joseph V. Dias



Skill Areas

4 skills

Critical

evaluation

Aims

With the wealth of information available on the Web come the twin problems of 1) finding information efficiently, and 2) deciding the trustworthiness of information deemed relevant to one's needs. Addressing the latter issue, the activities described here involve the development of techniques that students can employ to determine the level of confidence that any given Web content warrants.

Time Frame

3 hours (in 2

or 3 ses-

sions)

Prerequisites

Ss should know how to use e-mail and mailing lists or message boards, how to perform efficient Web searches, and how to create an outline using the outlining function of software (e.g., ClarisWorks, MS Word, Inspiration).

Hardware

1 C with Web

per 1 or 2

Ss

Process

Students are given an assignment to gather information on a controversial topic. Topics of personal interest to students are preferable. The concept of controversy may have to be explained to Ss beforehand, or Ts can provide a list of suggested topics so that Ss can come to understand the concept inductively. The reason for a focus on controversial issues is that evaluative skills are much more important when, for example, trying to understand the NRA's (National Rifle Association's) position on gun control, than when accessing information on Christmas customs around the world. The quality of information may be at issue in either case, but the motivation for bias (or, to use a euphemism, 'unique perspective') is more marked when dealing with the more controversial topic.

Software

Browser

Outliner

Email

Ss, or pairs of Ss, should be encouraged to choose different topics, as this will make the presentation part of the project more interesting to the audience. Also, different topics may elicit somewhat different sets of evaluative criteria.

Materials

Optional:

Whiteboard

Projector

Goals of the assignment: Ss will have to produce two 'products' -- the first one due midway through the activity and the other at the end.

Product #1 will be a list of criteria Ss develop in the course of gathering information on a controversial topic. It is important for Ss to realize that they can make use of evaluative tools they *may* already employ (e.g., in reading newspapers or listening to television news) when sifting the wheat from the chaff on the Web. The teacher should direct stu-

dents to search for information that is believable, supported by facts, and verifiable. They must record, in outline form, the methods *they* use to make these determinations. Depending on the size of the class and available class time, these methods can be shared orally or through a class mailing list or message board outside of class time. Remarks communicated orally can be compiled on a white board or projected from the T's computer. In the case of the e-mail/message board exchange, the T can summarize and review the responses so that Ss can make use of them in the next stage of the activity. In that stage, Ss are required to apply their expanded list of criteria to the data they have already gathered or, if they were persuaded to suspect its validity, to newly collected information and prepare Product #2.

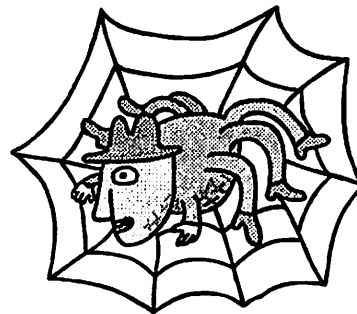
Product #2 is a brief -- 5-7 minute -- oral report on the controversial topic. Submission of written work is optional. The report must cover the opinions of individuals or groups on both sides of the issue, a summary and evaluation of the information found at relevant Web sites, and a statement of how the presenter's opinion on the issue was affected, if at all, by the new knowledge.

Examples

- Criteria for trusting (or not trusting) Web-based information
- Sophomore literature majors at Aoyama Gakuin University collaboratively produced the criteria.
- Features of a web site that suggest we can trust the information
- Full citations are given showing exactly who is responsible for the information and where it came from
- The source of information is relatively neutral: a newspaper or government agency as opposed to a lobbying group or company with an economic interest in the issue. [Some students had an overly simplistic view that if the information is, for example, in the New York Times or disseminated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration it must be trustworthy.]

Examples of Ts feedback on questionable criteria generated by Ss:

- Many students had the mistaken notion that information could be trusted because they found it using Yahoo or Excite or some other leading search engine. They were informed that search engines are tools to aid in FINDING information on the Web; they do not necessarily provide content evaluations of the pages they list.
- It is not necessarily a sign of trustworthiness if a web site has been accessed by many people. If that were the case, web sites featuring pornography would be the most trustworthy of all.
- A web site that presents information by someone who calls himself a doctor is not necessarily trustworthy simply for that reason. Anyone can call himself a doctor.



Variations

When determining trustworthiness, the medium, source and content all must be considered. With the Internet, there are often layers of media that make judgment even more tricky: a newspaper article reprinted on a web site, the content of a lecture recounted by a poster to a newsgroup, or a photograph of an aborted fetus attached to a message sent to a 'pro-choice' mailing list. Students have trouble understanding the directive "be sensitive to bias," however, they can often detect bias when faced with it.

Criteria for trustworthiness must be appropriate for Ss' English ability level and their skill in evaluating information in their native language must be taken into account. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers begin lessons on evaluating Web content by having Ss share the criteria they themselves apply, prior to specific instruction. In that way, the T can better understand the Ss' perspective, Ss can teach each other necessary skills, and Ts may learn about criteria unique to the ESL/EFL context that may not have occurred to them -- as I did from the group who concluded that "if a web site is easily understood to the reader, or contains pictures, it is more trustworthy."

As an extension to the activity on judging the content of Web sites, Ss can be asked to monitor a variety of mailing lists and Usenet newsgroups and come up with appropriate criteria for evaluating the often less polished, but more interactive, products of those media.

Links

The "ICYouSee Guide" to Critical Thinking About What You See on the Web
<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/Training/hott.html>

Author:

Joseph Dias has been using computers in his teaching for the last 7 years. He's finally getting the hang of it.