

Teaching Effective Search

Course

What Do I Expect to See When...? [6:53]

https://players.brightcove.net/2566261579001/HyuWsfFhb_default/index.html?videoId=6297969215001

About

- Learn the importance of visualizing your results before you search
- Learn to think about what you expect to see before you click on results
- Learn ways to problem solve to improve your search results

Transcript

Let's start with running a search. How many times has a student told you, "Google doesn't have anything on my topic"? I'm willing to bet you've heard it at least once or twice in your career. Running a search without predicting first, can lead you to think there's nothing there. On the other hand, taking a moment to visualize what you think you'll get when you run your search and then comparing your results to what you actually get, puts you in a mindset to problem solve rather than to assume that you're without resources.

For example, I had a fourth grader who was doing a report on ancient Greece. This was back around late 2010 or early 2011, and he did a search for Greek battle leaders. At the time, all the results that he got were on the Greek financial crisis, and how the government leaders were doing battle with other heads of state. He was pretty certain there was nothing about ancient Greece on the web. Luckily, we took this term that he himself was using ancient Greece, and we thought if we do a term for ancient Greek battle leaders will that get different results?

Another student had a similar problem when working on a paper on mythology. This student wanted to research giants. Now it happens that when you do research on the open web giants can be problematic as a term because there are multiple sports teams called Giants and also several products and companies that use that word in their name. They often tend to be ranked above the mythological concept of giants, because there's a perception on the part of most of the search engines I tried that people are wanting sports rather than mythology when they search for that word.

Luckily, this particular child's teacher taught the students when they ran into a problem to say to themselves, how fascinating? To ask themselves, why did I get this outcome that I hadn't expected? When the student asks, how fascinating. Why doesn't this match what I expected to see, the student was able to identify that adding the term mythology to the would probably solve the problem, and in fact it did. What we all need to do is to think what do I expect to see when I run this search, then type in our search terms, and if they aren't what we expected, say how fascinating, how do I need to change them to get a different result?

Now we want to apply the same principle when we're selecting which links we want to click on. We've run our search and we get results. Here, for example, I ran the search for giants in ABC's daily life database. Now there's a lot of good stuff here, but it is important to think through and pick what meets your needs, and prediction can help us do that. When I watch students generally interact with a list of results like this, they will start at the top and just start clicking. As they click, and if they're young, it may take them a significant amount of time to read a page and determine it's not what they're looking for. They click on the next one and the next one and so forth.

On the other hand, if I look carefully at this page with an eye towards predicting what's behind each link, I can get a lot further along. For example, when I look at the first result, the Viking religious beliefs of the medieval world, I can see that the word mythology appears in the description of the article and I can think, "Okay, that's probably going to have something useful." On the other hand, if I look at the third link about Vietnam technology, and life in the American military, I can see, again, in the summary of the article that there was a type of helicopter called "Jolly Green Giant." I can weed that out before I bother to click. Similarly, I can find myself looking at fast food in China, modern world, and wondering what does that have to do with Giants. An educated reader who's practiced some of the skills we're going to talk about will come to realize they're probably talking about giants of the fast food industry and that's another way we use the word giants in our everyday English.

But it is only through looking at links and predicting that we can start to become aware of how language works. By looking at things and not just clicking randomly but thinking about where we want to click, we can save ourselves time and frustration with a lot of wasted reading, and we can develop a stronger sense in our mind's eye of what we think the source will look like. You can do the same thing on the open web. Once you're digging into research, you can start thinking about, what is the title and the

URL? What are the title and the URL telling me about the page I'm going to see? What does the snippet or the words that are pulled out of the page and displayed on the screen telling me about the kind of content? Does that look like it's going to be useful for me? Does it look like a kind of resource that fits my information need?

In this way, students can gravitate towards more scholarly sources and not get caught in the myriad of less formal sources that might not be appropriate for their homework. With younger students, you can have them ask questions like, do these results match what you expected to find? Are there a lot of unexpected results that don't seem to match what you need? Why? Do they seem to be about just one topic or a lot of different topics? Do they offer any words or ideas that you can incorporate into your next search? Because sometimes as you're looking carefully at the results page, you'll actually see some terms and say, "Wait, I know that that's related to my topic and it will make my results stronger."

More experienced students can do this with more complex information needs. But in the same way they can run a simple search and get results. They may want to be thinking about, "Which of these results looks like it will match my need? What kind of source do I think this link will lead me to? Which are good for use as stepping stones?" Which we'll talk about shortly. Which are more valid as final sources.

I'm always frank with students. The truth is most of my first searches are terrible, but I use them very intentionally to figure out what my search should look like. These reflective practices of thinking about what I expect the search to produce and what I expect to see when I click on a link, actually help me access better results or decide how to change my search strategy to find better sources.

Activities

Imagine Your Perfect Source

If you are researching giants, does it make sense to click on a source from Major League Baseball? How do we get students to understand what their best resources will look like? Developing strong search skills involves several steps, one of which is imagining what your search results will look like. This allows students to become more selective researchers. Looking at their search results and checking that against what they pictured their results to look like put students in a problem solving mindset. After reviewing the resources below, complete the Reflect & Practice activity.

RESOURCES:



[Course Packet](#)



[Article](#)



[Article](#)

REFLECT & PRACTICE:

Teaching your students to use their predictive imaginations will allow them to see the results they expect to get in their searches before they have even fully developed their query. After reviewing the resources above, let's create something to start their imaginations flowing! Using page 4 of the Course Packet (found in the Resources above), choose 5 sources from the SLC articles provided and provide them with the URL only. Ask them to imagine the types of sources they would find on a site like that. Then have them visit the site and see how close they were!

Entry ID: 2277560

Choosing the Right Sources

Once your student has narrowed down their search results by imagining their source, how do they know which ones to choose? Is the site reliable? This is another important aspect of strong research skills. Choosing the right source takes some evaluation skills. When the brief blurbs found in the search results are not enough to determine if that site is what you need, what's next? How do you help students gravitate towards more scholarly sources, or even databases, for their research needs? After reviewing the resources below, complete the Reflect & Practice activity.

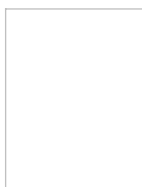
RESOURCES:



[Course Packet](#)



[Lesson Plan](#)



[Article](#)

REFLECT & PRACTICE:

You have led your students to use their imagination to find the best sources and weed out those that do not fit their research needs. Now they are faced with evaluating "the best of the best" to find the answer to their query. What are some skills your students need to help them evaluate a website? Review the lesson plan and articles in the Resources and then use page 5 of the Course Packet (found in the Resources above), to create your own lesson plan that will help students evaluate those sources they've imagined holds their answer.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Bibliography.](#)

MLA CITATION

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