

“Wikipedia: Friend or Foe?”

Lesson Snapshot

Introduction

- To start out the lesson, tell students that you want engage in an activity called “QuickSearching.”
- Explain to students the 4 components of a QuickSearch and have them go to a computer.

QuickSearches

- Provide the three topics and have students conduct their research however they see fit.

Picking Apart a Question or Topic

- Lead students through a discussion and practice on how to narrow topics to searchable terms.

Using Wikipedia Effectively

- Help students break down the structure of Wikipedia pages and discuss with them their ideas on how Wikipedia could be used more effectively.

Wrapping Up the Discussion

- Draw students’ attention to the “Contents” box of all Wikipedia pages, and lead them in a discussion of how the headings within the “Contents” section can be used to develop search terms for more in-depth research.

Knowledge in Action

- Allow students to put their newly acquired understanding of Wikipedia into action. Students can either develop an Argumentative Paper regarding Wikipedia as an effective research tool, or they can create a traditional Research Paper, using the “Contents” section as a means for developing search terms.

Materials Needed:

- Students will need access to computers with Internet capability.
- Students will need a pen/pencil and notebook paper or 3x5 note cards.

Before You Begin:

It is important to understand that this lesson DOES NOT teach students how to construct arguments. The basic structure of an argument is addressed in great detail in the lesson “The Logic of Legos.” It is a good idea to take your students through “The Logic of Legos” before engaging in this lesson.

To access “The Logic of Legos” go to: <http://k20alt.ou.edu/journal/legos/>

It is crucial that your students have Internet access and that the open source web encyclopedia, Wikipedia, is not blocked by your school’s firewall. Check with administrators to ensure that your students have access.

To take a closer look at how to work with students on using Wikipedia as a tool for developing search terms, check out this brief tutorial video at: <http://k20alt.ou.edu/tutorial/wikipedia/>

Student Objectives:

Students will:

- Analyze the effectiveness of open source media as a research tool.
- Develop search terms to effectively gather information over a wide range of topics.
- Evaluate the credibility of multiple sources of information.
- Use QuickSearch strategies as a means of gathering relevant information.

Introduction

To start out the lesson, tell students that you want engage in an activity called “QuickSearching.” This opening activity will work best in a computer lab in which each student has access to his or her own computer. If you do not have access to a lab with enough computers, it is okay to pair students.

Make sure that every student has either a sheet of notebook paper or some 3x5 note cards on which to write. Students will also need a pen or pencil.

Tell Students:

- I am going to give you a few brief topics over which I want you to find some quick facts. But, for this research I actually want you to use one of two search engines, either Google.com or Bing.com.

Ask Students:

- Is there anyone who is not familiar with how to use a search engine? (Take a few moments to assist any students who may have never used Google or Bing.)

Tell Students:

- After I give you a topic, I want you to do a few simple tasks for me:
 1. I want you to type some key words into the search field and see what you can find.
 2. I want you to write down the search terms that you typed in to find your information.
 3. Write down the short URL address of the top 5 websites that your search engine finds.
 4. Quickly write down the information that is relevant to the topic you were asked to research.

Ask Students:

- Are there any questions before we get started?
 - Take a few moments to address any questions that students may have, and then move into the QuickSearch phase of the lesson.

QuickSearches

The goal for this section of the lesson is focused more on allowing students the freedom to navigate Bing and Google in the manner that makes the most sense to them. Allow them to experiment with different search terms in order to find relevant information. We will be discussing an effective way to develop search terms later in the lesson. The goal here is trial and error.

Below is a list of three possible topics for students to explore. You will notice that they are not in-depth research questions. They are simply queries that require very specific answers. Give students 5-7 minutes for each topic. Remember, they have been tasked with several steps for each topic.

Topics:

1. Gather some basic statistics on the difference in population size of Oklahoma and Texas.
2. How many albums did the Beatles release before they broke up?
3. In what year did Adolf Hitler allegedly commit suicide?

Provide each topic one at a time, reminding students to write down their search terms, write down the URL of the top 5 websites found, and to write down relevant information that addresses the topic.

Note: Students do not need to write down the full URL address, simply the site name. (Ex: history.com)

Picking Apart a Question or Topic**Ask Students:**

- When you began your search, what search terms did you use?
- How did you decide which terms to use?

Tell Students:

- Let's look at each of these topics and discuss, as a class, some search terms that we might use to form our initial search.
- Let's first look at Topic 1:
 - *"Gather some basic statistics on the difference in population size of Oklahoma and Texas."*

Ask Students:

- What are some of the important terms that jump out when you look at this statement?
 - *Statistics*
 - *Population*
 - *Difference*
 - *Oklahoma*
 - *Texas*

Tell Students:

- These terms can be considered "key terms" when performing a search online. But it may be a good idea to first perform a more general search to simplify the process.

Ask Students:

- What specific information would you need in order to effectively address this topic?
 - *You would need the populations of both Oklahoma and Texas, and then you would have to do some basic math to figure the difference.*
- It is very likely that there is a website somewhere that answers this question directly, but rather than trying to pinpoint that exact website, what could we type into a search engine in order to get the necessary information we need?
 - *State populations, or*
 - *United States populations, or*
 - *Population by state*

Tell Students:

- Using either Google or Bing, type in the search terms “state populations”. Wikipedia should be one of the top returns for your search. Everyone click on the Wikipedia site.
- Using the information you find on this page, can someone tell me the difference in population between Oklahoma and Texas?

Have students talk through the other two topics in order to simplify their search terms. For both of the additional topics, students should be able to generalize the search terms to basic two or three-word searches.

Examples:

- Beatles albums
- Hitler death

Tell Students:

- Generalizing topics into simplified search terms will most likely lead students to Wikipedia time and time again. With proper instruction, Wikipedia can be a VERY useful research tool. Let’s take a look at how to use Wikipedia effectively.

Using Wikipedia Effectively

Ask Students:

- Why do a lot of teachers, parents, and students not trust Wikipedia as a trustworthy source for research?
 - *Anyone can contribute. You don’t have to be an expert to create a Wikipedia page.*
 - *It has been proven to be inaccurate in some cases.*
 - *A lot of people consider it to be just another Social site. It isn’t “academic”.*
- Are there any positives about Wikipedia? Is it useful at all?
 - *The majority of the information on Wikipedia is accurate.*
 - *It is easy to search for information on Wikipedia.*
- What are some ways we can verify the information that we find on Wikipedia?
 - *Don’t trust the information until you verify it on another site.*
 - *Get information about the author of the Wikipedia page. Are they credible?*
 - *Look at the references used on the Wikipedia page. Where is the author getting his or her information?*

It is important at this stage in the discussion to draw students’ attention to the bibliography and references that are cited on Wikipedia pages. Students may bring this up on their own, but if they don’t, have them pull up a Wikipedia page and direct their attention to the bottom where this information can be found.

Tell Students:

- I want everyone to go to Wikipedia.com and type in the search terms “World War 2”.
- This is an extremely long Wikipedia article. As you scroll through the information, do you notice anything that might help you sift through the large amount of information?

Students will most likely notice the “Contents” section. But, if they do not, make it a point to point it out to them.

Ask Students:

- Would it be possible to write a research paper over the entire 2nd World War?
 - *No. There is too much information to cover in one research paper.*
- How could you use Wikipedia to help you narrow your topic if you wanted to research World War 2?
 - **Allow students to offer different suggestions on how to effectively use Wikipedia.**
 - **Students may suggest using the “Contents” section as a place to find good search terms, but if they do not bring this up, offer it as a suggestion.**
- Would it be a good idea to write an entire research paper only citing Wikipedia as your source?
 - *No. It is important to have multiple sources, and multiple perspectives.*
 - *No. Good research pulls information from a variety of media and sources.*
- Everyone take a look on the WW2 Wikipedia page at the box that says “Contents”. What is the purpose of the “Contents” box?
 - *It is an outline of all of the information found on the page.*
 - *It links to specific information within the Wikipedia page.*
- Could this section be used to help someone narrow down a research topic?
 - *Yes. A person could click on one of the links and read more about a specific part of World War 2 instead of trying to read the entire page.*

Wrapping Up the Discussion

To wrap up, point out to students that Wikipedia can serve as a great starting point for research. The important thing is to not let it be the only source of information. Your school should have access, through the library, to a number of credible databases, encyclopedias, and digital research tools.

Wikipedia can be used as an excellent way for students to gather basic information about a topic, and they can use the terms found in the “Contents” section of the Wikipedia page as search terms for further research.

To take a closer look at how to work with students on using Wikipedia as a tool for developing search terms, check out this brief tutorial video at: <http://k20alt.ou.edu/tutorial/wikipedia/>

Knowledge in Action

There are a few possibilities for student assessment in relation to this brief lesson. This next section explores a couple of options and provides a basic structure to help you, the teacher, assess student understanding.

Assignment 1:

Students will develop a basic Research Paper over a topic of their choosing. Students will be required to first visit the Wikipedia page that addresses their topic, to develop a basic understanding of the issues and gather search terms to be used.

The final product will consist of a 6-8 page paper, a printout of the basic outline, a bibliography of referenced sources, and a list of the search terms that the students obtained as a result of their Wikipedia search.

For tips on helping students get started with their research, check out:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/1/>

Assignment 2:

Students will write an Argumentative Paper that supports or negates Wikipedia as a credible tool when conducting research. This assignment gives students the ability to not only research Wikipedia, but it also allows them to practice their argumentative writing skills. Students must include an initial claim, evidence or warrants/backing to justify their claim, and rebuttals to possible counterclaims.

The final product will consist of a 3-5 page paper, a printout of the basic outline, and a bibliography of referenced sources.

Check out these two brief tutorial videos that explain the basic structure of an argument:

- **Constructing and Argument:** <http://k20alt.ou.edu/tutorial/constructing-an-argument/>
- **The Logic of Legos:** <http://k20alt.ou.edu/tutorial/legos/>

For a lesson that prepares students to develop an argument, check out:

<http://k20alt.ou.edu/journal/legos/>

For in-depth assistance in helping your students craft their arguments into a written paper, check out:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/724/01/>

Common Core Standards Addressed

Writing Standards 9-10

Grades 9–10 students:

Text Types and Purposes

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
 - a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
 - b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.
 - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
 - d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
 - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

2. 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.
 - a. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
 - b. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
 - c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
 - d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.
 - e. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
 - f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).