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Six frames, four moves, one habit

Finding ACRL's Framework within SIFT

The SIFT method of source evaluation, proposed in 2017 by educational technologist Mike Caulfield, was designed as a "practical approach to quick source and claim investigation."[1] At this time, academic librarians (including us) had already been questioning the effectiveness of popular source evaluation methods, especially checklist-based ones. Checklists seem too cursory and lack the flexibility and nuance needed to fully address the complex nature of internet sources.[2] The number of librarian-proposed updates to checklist methods of source evaluation has accelerated in recent years,[3] while SIFT has also emerged as a popular evaluation method with librarians.[4]

Because of SIFT's popularity, and because we ourselves are using SIFT, we wanted to look closely at SIFT through the lens of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy. We believe there is value in using concepts from the entire Framework to best teach source evaluation.[5] It is important to identify overlap and gaps between the SIFT method and the ACRL Framework. Where does SIFT align with the evaluation expectations expressed within the Framework? What may academic librarians need to pair with SIFT lessons to better teach source evaluation? To answer our questions, we mapped the six frames of the ACRL Framework to the four moves and one habit of SIFT. Here, we introduce each move of SIFT, then connect it with relevant parts of the Framework. We also note where the Framework addresses source evaluation differently or in a more extended way than SIFT does, and what that might mean for librarians using SIFT in their classrooms.

SIFT: Four moves and a habit

Stop, Investigate, Find Better Coverage, and Trace Claims (SIFT) are separate yet related moves that fact-checkers may use to evaluate web sources. Embedded within these moves is a strategy known as lateral reading, which involves going outside of a source being evaluated and finding what others say about its reputation. Caulfield published an early version of SIFT, originally called "Four Moves and a Habit," in *Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers*. This approach to examining web sources is intended to recontextualize a source by "reconstructing the necessary context to read, view, or listen to digital content effectively."[6] The moves progressively delve deeper into a source, though not all sources will need the full treatment to determine the suitability of a source for a purpose. Caulfield updated and streamlined this into the SIFT method through a 2019 blog post and further refinements over time through lesson plans and other tools for teaching.[7] We used all these

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documentations of SIFT to draw the fullest picture of how SIFT works and is taught. We acknowledge that each move of SIFT, like each frame of the ACRL Framework, contains some overlap in concepts with the other moves.

Stop

The initial move in SIFT, Stop, directs "Don't read or share media until you know what it is."[8] To learn what you are looking at, pause and ask yourself what you already know. Are you familiar with the website or information source? What do you know about "the reputation of both the claim and the website"?Stop is also a reminder to keep an eye on your purpose. It gives permission to do a "quick and shallow" review of a source's reputation for most situations unless the context of the research is for more academic or scientific purposes, in which case a deeper examination may be warranted. In Stop, students pause to decide whether they want to investigate their source further. If a fast evaluation doesn't tell you enough for your purpose, you can continue to the next move.

The Stop move, though brief, connects to the frames Authority is Constructed and Contextual, Information Creation as a Process, Information has Value, Research as Inquiry, and Searching as Strategic Exploration. The first three frames acknowledge in varying ways that value (of information, of a source) changes based on context.[9] The Framework also addresses the need to keep a focus on your purpose, with both the Research as Inquiry and Searching as Strategic Exploration frame's inclusion of determining and limiting the scope of an investigation.[10]

Investigate the Source

If you aren't familiar with a source or its reputation, Investigate the Source is the next move. Here, you start to answer the questions asked in Stop, seeking more information to understand the credentials, potential bias, and agenda of the authors, as well as the reputation of the authors and the source. Answering questions like, "Is the site or organization I am researching what I thought it was?"[11] is critical to investigation because SIFT emphasizes that "knowing the expertise and agenda of the source is crucial to your interpretation of what they say."[12] This move also allows for context in its consideration of authority. Practical contextualized examples are found in Caulfield's supplementary works. For instance, Caulfield notes that "a small local paper may be a great source for local news, but a lousy source for health advice or international politics."[13] Caulfield also recommends using an investigative strategy called "Just add Wikipedia."[14] In this version of lateral reading, students are asked to use Wikipedia to learn more about websites they found. Investigating who runs a website, why it exists, and its reputation helps determine the legitimacy of a site.

Two ACRL frames, Authority is Constructed and Contextual, along with Information Creation as a Process, are most relevant to this move. Authority is Constructed and Contextual states that "information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used."[15] Several knowledge practices from this frame address methods for evaluating authority, such as using relevant research tools and developing an understanding that authority can be based on many factors including subject expertise, social position, or personal experience. Librarians can help students imagine different kinds of expertise and experts depending on the context. Although this frame, by its very name, asks students to go further into analyzing

the contextual nature of authority than the SIFT process does, both consider the importance of context in source evaluation.

The Information Creation as a Process frame notes the importance of additional aspects of investigating the quality of a source. This frame states that "elements that affect or reflect on the creation, such as a pre- or post-publication editing or review process, may be indicators of quality."[16] However, the SIFT method does not ask students to look this deeply into a source. SIFT asks students to use lateral reading to determine more about the reputation of a source. During this move, students may encounter information about a source's editorial processes, but they are not intentionally seeking that out. Even something as simple as identifying the type of source, be it a blog or an academic journal article preprint, may offer clues about the level of review the contents received.

This can be especially important at the beginning of a research project when students are judging how much (and what kind of) further research might be needed. Information Creation as Process emphasizes the importance of learning to "assess the fit between an information product's creation process and a particular information need" and to "recognize that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it is packaged."[17] SIFT does not explicitly advocate for students to determine types of sources, so librarians may need to discuss this with students, especially because using specific types of sources is often required in academic work.

Find Better Coverage/Find Trusted Coverage

If students find a source with a claim they are interested in, but they are unconvinced of the trustworthiness of the source, they can search for a better source that makes a similar claim. In this move, students go beyond investigating a source to seek stronger or more trusted sources or to find general consensus about a topic or claim. Here they may also verify the accuracy of the claim or whether experts agree with it. In his original post about SIFT, Caulfield explains it like this: "You want to know if [a claim] is true or false. You want to know if it represents a consensus viewpoint, or if it is the subject of much disagreement."[18] Gaining a sense of what experts in the field think about their topic helps students better judge if the source is an outlier to those expert views. Additional perspectives also help put sources into context. In both this move and the ACRL Framework, students are encouraged to develop an informed skepticism about the sources they locate and to strive to find the best possible sources for their research needs.

Finding better or trusted coverage connects with every ACRL frame. Assertions about the trustworthiness of a source align with the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame's focus on "creators' expertise and credibility."[19] The Information Creation as a Process and Information has Value frames are linked with the need to understand that the way information is created influences its credibility and value. The Research as Inquiry frame indicates that skilled researchers exhibit dispositions of "maintain[ing] an open mind and a critical stance" and "seek[ing] multiple perspectives during information gathering and assessment."[20] Scholarship as Conversation also speaks of the need to understand that "a query may not have a single uncontested answer. Experts . . . seek out many perspectives."[21] Librarians may want to discuss with students that there may not be a clear consensus among experts, and that is part of the ongoing academic conversation. Finally, the Searching as Strategic Exploration frame says that information-literate learners "realize that information sources

vary greatly in content and format and have varying relevance and value."[22] The Framework encourages students to fully explore the information available to them, rather than sticking with the first source they find. While SIFT focuses students' attention on finding better sources, the Framework has much more to say about how to actually do this. Librarians can teach students search strategies to help them locate better sources.

Trace Claims

The Trace Claims move says to evaluate sources by following quotes, claims, or media back to their original context and to check if text, images, videos, or sound recordings have been altered from the original format. Especially with internet sources, it's possible that a source has evolved from an original post or story into something that has been "altered so much that it presents a radically wrong version of an event or a piece of research."[23] Finding the original source allows students to recontextualize information and determine if a source remained true to the context or was misrepresented. Reading quotations within their original context may help students understand why the authors chose to use those quotations, and if the authors understood the quotations in the same way. Each of these considerations make a difference in deciding if a source is trustworthy.

The need to trace claims is closely connected to multiple frames. Context is especially important in the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame, which states learners should "ask relevant questions about origins, context, and suitability for the current information need."[24] The Information has Value frame encourages respect for the original ideas of others, stressing that learners "value the skills, time and effort needed to produce knowledge."[25] Scholarship as Conversation asserts that learners "critically evaluate contributions made by others in participatory information environments."[26] This frame engages more deeply with the need to respect the work of others than SIFT does, primarily by showing how writing practices that value citing other experts enable scholars to have conversations with one another.

One habit

The affective dimensions of the researcher are considered within SIFT as the "habit" introduced in *Web Strategies for Fact-Checkers* ("Four moves and a habit").[27] When a source provokes strong emotion, whether positive or negative, check in with your emotions to see if they are influencing your evaluation. Caulfield references research that describes how an emotional response to information can activate your confirmation bias, that "our normal inclination is to ignore verification needs when we react strongly to content."[28] People often assume that information we agree with is correct and information we disagree with is incorrect. Students need to learn to override this tendency or at least examine it closely before using information.

One frame directly references effect, and this dimension is also addressed within each frame's dispositions. Searching as Strategic Exploration acknowledges that "information searching is a contextualized, complex experience that affects, and is affected by, the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of the searcher."[30] Authority is Constructed and Contextual's dispositions refer to managing bias, noting the need for qualities including open-mindedness, self-awareness, and recognition of the value of diversity in worldviews. These dispositions

are reiterated throughout the framework. Awareness of these often-personal dimensions is important to both source evaluation and conducting research itself.

Conclusion

Both SIFT and the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education are used by librarians to support source evaluation, the first as a strategy to teach to students, and the second as a set of underpinning concepts that supports the foundation of lesson plans and information literacy instruction as a whole. Looking at SIFT through the broadest lens possible, it's clear that some frames are much more evident than others. The Framework's concepts, practices, and dispositions that focus on evaluating sources rather than finding or creating them are more prevalent within SIFT. It's worth noting that SIFT was developed as a quick way to evaluate internet sources, while academic librarians are teaching students to find and evaluate a wider variety of sources.

Overall, the SIFT method at least scratches the surface of all the ACRL frames, making SIFT a more robust method for teaching source evaluation than others we have seen. Librarians can incorporate concepts that are less prominent in SIFT, such as the importance of information-creation processes and developing good strategies for locating better sources—in other ways and at other moments—as we extend our instruction to help students not only evaluate but also use their sources well.

Notes

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6. Mike Caulfield, "SIFT (The Four Moves)," *Hapgood*, June 19, 2019, https://hapgood .us/2019/06/19/sift-the-four-moves/.
7. Mike Caulfield, "Updated Resources for 2021," in *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers . . . and Other People Who Care About Facts* (Montreal: Pressbooks, 2017), https:// pressbooks.pub/webliteracy/front-matter/updated-resources-for-2021/.

8. Caulfield, "SIFT (The Four Moves)."

9. ACRL, "Framework."

10. ACRL, "Framework," 18.

11. Mike Caulfield, "Check, Please! Starter Course: Lesson Two: Investigate the Source," *Notion.so*, n.d., https://checkpleasecc.notion.site/Lesson-Two-Investigate-the-Source-dc0ab 0dc7c394df9bcab6ffdb4edf626.

12. Caulfield, "SIFT (The Four Moves)."

13. Caulfield, "Check, Please!"

14. Mike Caulfield, "Just Add Wikipedia," *Sifting through the Pandemic: Information Hygiene for the Covid-19 Pandemic* (blog), February 17, 2020, https://infodemic.blog /2020/02/17/just-add-wikipedia/.

15. ACRL, "Framework," 12.

16. ACRL, "Framework," 14.

17. ACRL, "Framework," 14.

18. Caulfield, "SIFT (The Four Moves)."

19. ACRL, "Framework," 12.

20. ACRL, "Framework," 19.

21. ACRL, "Framework," 20.

22. ACRL, "Framework," 23.

23. Caulfield, "Check, Please!"

24. ACRL, "Framework," 12.

25. ACRL, "Framework," 17.

26. ACRL, "Framework," 20.

27. Mike Caulfield, "Building a Fact-Checking Habit by Checking Your Emotions," in *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers . . . and Other People Who Care About Facts* (Montreal: Pressbooks, 2017), https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/.

28. Caulfield, *Web Literacy,* 3.

29. ACRL, "Framework," 22.