

2020

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Original Citation

Goodsett, M. (2020). "Inviting Students into the Kitchen: Inquiry-Based Learning as a Critical Thinking Instructional Strategy," in *The Critical Thinking About Sources Cookbook*, ed. Sarah Morris. Chicago: ACRL Publications.

Repository Citation

Goodsett, Mandi, "Inviting Students into the Kitchen: Inquiry-Based Learning as a Critical Thinking Instructional Strategy" (2020). *Michael Schwartz Library Publications*. 166.
https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/msl_facpub/166

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Inviting Students into the Kitchen:

Inquiry-Based Learning as a Critical Thinking Instructional Strategy

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This recipe was developed to teach first- or second-year students source evaluation using inquiry-based learning. The method could be modified for a variety of settings, including online. The purpose behind using inquiry-based learning is to develop students' cognitive habits of questioning, so they are able to transfer the evaluation skills they learn in the library session to other contexts. The evaluation process is focused less on finding quick answers and more on developing meaningful, searching questions about sources that are found as evidence.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will use inquiry-based learning to develop evaluation skills and the ability to ask meaningful questions about sources.

COOKING TIME

20–60 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- Whiteboard, blackboard, or smartboard
- Computers for students to find their own source to evaluate

PREPARATION

- Establish a relationship with the instructor.

- Review the course syllabus.
- Confirm that the students will be conducting research and/or evaluating information sources as part of an assignment for the course. Determine what kind of information students are being asked to evaluate.
- Ascertain when students will be expected to choose sources for their research assignment and time the library instruction session accordingly.

COOKING METHOD

1. Often, we use checklists or other mnemonics to help students evaluate sources, but these tools may not encourage students to develop habits of inquiry or skepticism. This cooking method provides an alternative.
2. Instead of giving students an acronym and having them evaluate sources using it, start by working with the students to create a comprehensive list of questions that students might have about an information source. It can help to frame it as putting the source “on trial”; if students really needed to be certain a source was reliable, what would they need to know? Ask students to be as thorough as possible in their questioning. Usually, this question list is developed as part of a group

discussion, but it could also be completed as a think-pair-share activity. Sometimes it takes some prompting, but the students generally generate questions that meet all of the elements of the CRAAP test or a similar checklist and beyond.

3. Next, ask them to find a source and come up with their own list of questions about that source.
4. Once they have a list of questions, ask them to try to answer the questions on their own or with a partner. Emphasize the importance of the questions themselves, not just the answers.
5. This activity could be modified by having students choose resources, develop questions about the resources, and then switch with each other. The students would then be required to answer the questions developed by another student and perhaps even think of a few additional questions for another round of swapping. In an online environment, students could share their questions on a Padlet page.

ALLERGY WARNINGS

- Students may not be immediately forthcoming with ideas for questions about a source. It can help to give them an example of a time they would need very high-quality information (e.g., when

researching a personal health-related issue, making a big purchase, or writing an important assignment) and ask them to really interrogate their information source. You may also find it helpful to evaluate an example source with the entire class to demonstrate the level of skepticism you're expecting.

- If students are hesitant to come up with their own questions about a source on their own, provide the CRAAP test or another checklist as a starting place for developing questions. You can also give them a question bank to choose from, but the activity will have the greatest impact if students develop their own questions.
- Developing good questions is only half the battle; sometimes student-generated questions about a source are tricky for them to answer. You may need to provide some instruction on how to find answers to these difficult questions or plan for one-on-one time with students who are struggling to answer their questions. The struggle to answer tough questions about a source is, in itself, a learning opportunity.

CHEF'S NOTE

While it sounds simple, the act of developing their own questions about a source helps students develop habits of inquiry that can transfer to new contexts. One challenge of critical thinking skills is that they are often learned contextually, and humans are not naturally good at transferring these kinds of

skills. By drilling the development of evaluative questions, librarians can increase the impact of their instruction beyond the single session or assignment of the library instruction.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Halpern, Diane F. "Teaching Critical Thinking for Transfer across Domains." *American Psychologist* 53, no. 4 (1998): 449–55. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.53.4.449.

King, Alison. "Designing the Instructional Process to Enhance Critical Thinking across the Curriculum." *Teaching of Psychology* 22, no. 1 (February 1995): 13.