

Analyze A Global Issue



SECTION 1: CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

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SECTION 1
DEALING WITH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

WHAT ARE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES?

It is very difficult to say what the future will be like but what is certain is that you will be faced with decisions about a wide range of issues about which people have contradictory views. One important element of global citizenship is thinking critically about controversial issues and making informed choices as you exercise your individual rights and carry out your obligations to others.

Controversial issues are those that have a political, social or personal impact and deal with questions of value and belief. Such issues can be local or global, ranging from bullying, personal lifestyle, and banning cars from school property to the effects of globalization or climate change.



Controversial issues are usually complicated, with no easy answers and are issues on which people hold strong views based on different experiences, interests and values.

Almost any issue can become controversial if one side of an issue is presented in a way that raises the emotional response of those who might disagree.



Where do you get your information about controversial issues?

According to a 2008 Canadian Media Report nearly 75% of you get your news from the Internet while less than 10 % of you get your news from the traditional media, such as newspapers, television, radio and magazines. These statistics represent a significant increase in the use of the Internet for news from similar surveys conducted earlier and approximately 24% of you have left the traditional media because of a lack of trust.



Do you personally mistrust the traditional media to accurately report the news?

If you do, it is probably because like others of your generation you have come to realize that:

- in order to attract audiences, media companies often focus on stories of disaster and problems rather than good news which is most likely to be less dramatic; and
- news companies, just like other businesses, are owned by individuals who may have a particular point of view they wish to promote.

Consequently, you have turned to other media for information about current global issues. However, you should realize that living in an information age can be both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because there are many sources of information available but it is a curse because not all information sources contain accurate information.



Your challenge is to distinguish between the good and the bad as you educate yourself about what is going on in the world.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

You can begin evaluating physical information sources, such as books or articles in periodicals, even before you have the physical item in your hand. Evaluate such a source by first examining the bibliographic citation which is the written description of a book, journal article, essay, or some other published material that appears in a catalog or index. Information in a bibliographic citation usually includes the:

- author,
- publication date,
- edition or revision,
- publisher, and
- title.

This information can help you determine the usefulness of this source for your purpose.

A FIRST LOOK–BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Author

Determine the author's credentials which includes:

- educational background,
- previous writings,
- work experience, and
- area of expertise.

Further, try to determine if the author is:

- cited in other sources, and
- associated with a reputable institution or organization.

Publication Date

It is important that your information sources are up-to-date because the world is changing very fast especially in the business, the science, and technology sectors.



Did you know?

The publication date is often located on the face of the title page below the name of the publisher? If the publication date is not there, look for the copyright date on the reverse of the title page?

Edition or Revision

Determine if this is a first edition or not. Further editions of a source indicate that it has been updated with current information. Also, if a source has many printings or editions, it may indicate that the source has become a standard source in this area and is reliable.

Publisher

The publisher can be a good clue as to the reliability of a source. For example, if the publisher is a university, it is likely to be a scholarly source that is reliable.



Did you know?

It is important to determine if the publisher has a connection with a particular political party, corporation or other organization, such as conservation groups? This kind of affiliation may indicate that the book or article is biased in favour of the viewpoints or beliefs of these groups?

A FINAL LOOK—EXAMINE THE CONTENTS

Information sources, such as journals, magazines and newspapers which may contain valuable, up-to-date information are not created equal. These types of publications are often categorized as:

- scholarly journal,
- news or general interest publication,
- popular magazine, or
- sensational magazine or newspaper.



It is crucial that you consider the type of publication before using it an information source.

As you encounter these publications, consider the following:

Scholarly Journals

These publications are also called academic, peer-reviewed or refereed journals. Scholarly journals:

- have a summary of the article's contents before the main article;
- contain many graphs and charts but few if any glossy pages and dramatic pictures;
- always include a list of the information sources used in the article;
- are written by experts in that particular field whose personal information is generally located on the bottom of the first page;
- use technical language and requires the reader to have some background knowledge; and
- are usually published by professional organizations in the fields of medicine, law and education, for example ,or are published by educational institutions such as universities.



Peer review means that several experts must examine and approve the content of an article before it is published.

News or General Interest Publication

These publications are usually attractive in appearance, published in magazine or newspaper format and contain articles that are often heavily illustrated with photographs. News or general interest publications:

- sometimes provide a list of information sources but not always;
- contain articles written by staff writers or editors, scholars or freelance writers;
- use language that requires a certain level of education but does not require the reader to be an expert;
- are usually published by businesses or individuals; and
- are intended to provide general information on a variety of subjects to a wide audience.



Do you personally know anyone who has written articles for a news or general interest publication?

Popular Magazines

Popular magazines come in many formats but are most often glossy and attractive looking with lots of colour graphics, such as photographs and drawings. Popular magazines:

- do not include lists of information sources;
- use information that is often second-hand or third-hand and the original source is rarely mentioned;
- contain articles that are very short and written in simple language; and
- are mainly intended to entertain the reader, sell products or promote a personal viewpoint.

Sensational Publications

Sensational publications are published in a variety of styles but usually in newspaper format. Sensational publications:

- use very simple language;
- most often use emotional or exaggerated language;
- depend on an audience that is very easily convinced of things;
- use flashy headlines that are designed to surprise the reader; and
- are intended to arouse curiosity or appeal to stereotypes.



Activate Your Brain #1:

Label the publications listed below as scholarly, news or general interest, popular or sensational. Write your response opposite the type of publication.

- National Geographic _____
- Reader's Digest _____
- Journal of the Canadian Medical Association _____
- The Globe and Mail _____
- The National Examiner _____
- Sports Illustrated _____
- Canadian Economic Review _____
- The Star _____



Try your hand at sensationalism. Write a headline that might appear on the front page of a sensational publication about a current global issue or news item.



Look online at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm> for more information on using books and articles from different types of publications.

SECTION 2

DEALING WITH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES USING INTERNET SOURCES



Did you know?

Using the Internet carelessly is like going to the magazine section in a store, reaching out with your eyes closed and grabbing the first magazine you touch. What is the likelihood that you will find a reliable source? Now imagine that your local store owner prints up a magazine and puts it in the magazine section. Have your chances of getting an accurate reliable source increased or decreased?

Welcome to the Internet! Information is everywhere on the Internet and it is continuously being created and revised; therefore, the problem with accuracy becomes very important. Accurate information is important because it serves as the basis for your beliefs, decisions, choices, and understanding of the world, but on the Internet while such information is easily available, it ranges from the very good to the very bad.



Another analogy might be helpful. If you eat something harmful that you believe to be safe, you can become ill; if you avoid something good that you believe to be harmful, you have needlessly restricted your enjoyment of a certain aspect of life. The same thing applies to your attempts to understand what is going on in the world. How can you tell if something you are reading is true and reliable or false and unreliable?

FIRST LOOK—SCREENING THE WEB SITE



Did you know?

that examining a website's home page is the same as checking the bibliographic citation for a book and helps you determine the reliability of an Internet source?

Determine the Authority of the Site

Determining the authority of any particular website is especially important. Ask yourself these questions about the website:

- Is it absolutely clear which company or organization is responsible for the information on the site?
- Is there a link to a page describing what the company or organization does and the people who are involved normally referred to as an "About Us" page?
- Is there a valid way of making sure the company or organization is a real place that has real contact information? An email address is not enough.



If you answered "**NO**" to any of these questions the site is probably unreliable.

Determine the Accuracy of the Information

Eventually, while you are on the Web, you will encounter information that is not entirely true. In addition to determining the authority of a site, you also need to figure out if it is presenting accurate information. Ask yourself these questions about the information:

- Can I easily figure out who wrote the information?
- Are all factual claims clearly supported with documentary proof?
- Are there links to other sources?
- Are there any obvious grammatical and spelling errors which may indicate that the content is not accurate?
- How long ago was the page updated? Is there a date stamp on the article somewhere?
- Are the writer's qualifications clearly stated somewhere on the site?



Once again if you answered "**NO**" to any of these questions the site is probably unreliable.

Determine the Motivation of the Author

To find a non-biased information source, you will need to determine if the site has an interest in something other than providing accurate information. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does the writing seem fair and balanced or does it seem slanted toward a particular point of view?
- Can you determine from the site address who the site belongs to? Most organizations and businesses put their name in the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) unless they have a reason not to do so and this is a good way to determine quickly if the site is reliable. A piece on smoking and health created by the tobacco industry is most likely unreliable.
- Are the advertisements, if there are any, clearly separated from the content?



Any site that has a bias or a hazy line between the advertisements and the content is **NOT** a reliable site.

If the information is linked to an organization, try to determine its reliability by looking at the URL of the web page:

- if the URL ends with .edu, it is most likely an educational institution and most likely reliable;
- if the URL ends in .gc.ca, it is most likely a reliable government website; and



Government sites are usually good sources for statistics and objective reports.

- if the URL ends in .org it is usually a non-profit organization which can be good or bad depending on their goals or political biases.



Be aware that some websites with the .org ending are advocacy groups for a particular cause and are biased in favour of that particular cause.



Did you know?

A reputable online journal or magazine should contain a bibliography for every article. The list of sources within that bibliography should be extensive and it should include scholarly, non-Internet sources.



Did you know?

Network and cable news stations are also involved in entertainment and you should consider them a stepping stone to other sources. Every television and print news source has a website. To some extent, you can rely on the most trusted news sources, but you should not rely on them exclusively.

Use Common Sense

Just because something is on the Web does not mean it is reliable and accurate. Some common places to find opinions and works of fiction that can be disguised as facts are:

Blogs. Anybody can publish a blog on the Internet which makes it very difficult to determine the background of the blogger or get an understanding of their level of expertise. Many people create blogs simply to give themselves a forum to express their views and opinions.

Personal websites. A web page is much like a blog when it comes to being an unreliable source. Web pages are created by the public and it is sometimes difficult to determine which websites are created by experts and professionals on a given topic.



Did you know?

Using information from a personal website is a little like collecting information from strangers on the street.

Wiki Sites. Wiki websites can be very informative, but they can also be untrustworthy. Wiki sites allow groups of people to add and edit the information contained on the pages without any or little regard for their expertise in the particular field.



Is it acceptable to use Wikipedia as a source of information? Wikipedia contains a great deal of information and is probably best used to get a reliable overview of a topic which gives you a good place to start and a collection of links to other resources.

A FINAL LOOK–DETERMINE THE QUALITY



Did you know?

Determining the quality of information is more like an art than a science because there is no single perfect indicator of reliability, truthfulness, or value. Instead, you must make a decision about whether to use a source from a collection of clues or indicators.

When researching information from the Internet, use the **CAFÉ** (Challenge, Adapt, File, and Evaluate) strategy as you encounter new material. The **CAFÉ** strategy includes:

- **Challenge** the information by asking questions like: Who says so? Why do they say so? Why was this information created? Why should I believe it? Why should I trust this source? Is it truthful and reasonable?
- **Adapt** or raise your standard and require more evidence for stronger claims which conflict with commonly accepted ideas. The new information may be true but you should not automatically accept that it is true.
- **File** new information in your mind rather than immediately believing or disbelieving it. Do not jump to a conclusion or come to a decision too quickly. Simply file away for future reference that someone claims something to be the case and reserve judgement about believing or disbelieving it.
- **Evaluate** and re-evaluate regularly. New information or changing circumstances affects the accuracy of information. You should recognize that information is constantly changing especially in science, medicine, business and technology.

If the resource stands up to your initial examination, apply the **CARS** (Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness and Support) strategy to finally determine if you will use a particular source. The **CARS** strategy includes:

- **Credibility** means trustworthy. Look at the author's credentials, evidence of quality control, such as peer review, and the reputation of the organization when determining credibility. Your goal is to find an authoritative source that contains good information and evidence that allows you to trust it.
- **Accuracy** means the information is up-to-date, factual, detailed, exact, and complete. Your goal is to find a source that is correct today and not yesterday, which gives the whole truth.
- **Reasonableness** means the information is fair, balanced, objective, and logical without conflict of interest, errors, or slanted tone. Your goal is to find a source that presents the subject thoughtfully and reasonably, in a truthful manner.
- **Support** means the source has links, contact information, proof of its claims as supporting documentation. Your goal is to find a source that provides convincing evidence for the claims made which can be supported by at least two other sources.



It is important that you keep an open mind regarding important issues. When you are confronted with information that contradicts or confirms your personal opinion you must still be objective and regarding the reliability of the source.



Look online at <http://www.virtualsalt.com/eval8it.htm> for more information on the **CAFÉ** and **CARS** strategies.

SECTION 3 ANALYZE A GLOBAL ISSUE

MAJOR GLOBAL ISSUES

Some of the more important current global issues which are unlikely to go away in the near future include the following:

Population

World population passed 6 billion in 2000, up from 2.5 billion in 1950. It is projected to grow to 8 billion in 2025, 9.3 billion in 2050, and eventually to stabilize at 10.5–11 billion with almost all growth occurring in the developing world. The world will need to feed 5 billion more people, which combined with higher standards of living, will put enormous strains on land, water, energy and other natural resources.

Poverty and Inequality

Hunger is slowly declining in most developing countries but the degree of inequality between rich and poor is not getting better. The Sustainable World Coalition claims that as of 2009, there are still 1.2 billion people who live on less than \$1 per day.

Food Consumption

Food consumption per capita is increasing substantially around the world in both developed and developing countries. Food production is increasing, but continued increase is limited by available land and water, especially in Asia. Land suitable for agriculture is being used for economic development as the population of developing countries continues to increase and their economies improve through globalization.

Water

Water use is growing over twice the rate that population is growing and as of 2009, 70 % of water was used for agriculture. Development increases water use and hence water scarcity. Worldwide, half of all wetlands have been lost, and more than 20% of the 10 000 known freshwater species are extinct or threatened. By 2025, nearly half the world's population will experience water shortages.

Forests

The world's forests continue to shrink with the highest rate of decline in Africa followed by Latin America. Almost the entire decline is in tropical areas, which contain about half of all remaining forests. Expansion of agriculture is by far the main cause of deforestation. The loss of forests is lowering water quality and causing floods. About 10% of tree species are at risk of extinction.

Energy

Consumption of all types of energy is growing with the largest increase being fossil fuels. Biomass from burning wood and animal dung is used as the primary energy source in many developing countries but this causes air pollution and health problems although new burning techniques are helping. Renewable energy sources, mostly hydroelectric, account for 4–5% of the world's energy but solar and wind power in 2009, accounted for only 0.04% of the total.

Climate Change

Fossil fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions continue to grow especially in Asia and the United States (US). The level of consumption and emissions per capita is 10 times higher in the US than in the developing countries, and twice as high as in Europe. There are many signs of climate change, such as rising temperature, rising ocean levels, 40% melting of Arctic ice, and changing weather patterns including more intense droughts and more intense storms. Insurance payments from storm damage, has increased from \$2 billion per year in the 80s to \$30 billion in the 90s.

Health

Most deaths in the least developed countries are readily preventable. These deaths, often in childhood, are primarily due to communicable, environment-related diseases. Most common of these are due to lack of clean water and sanitation. In 2009, over one billion people still lack access to safe water and 2.5 billion lack adequate sanitation facilities with the great majority living in rural Africa and Asia.



Using the information contained in this lesson examine two websites, provided by your Proficiency Level Officer, on an important global issue such as those described above by first applying the **CAFÉ** strategy and then the **CARS** checklist to decide which of the two sites contains the more reliable source.

EVALUATING WEBSITES CHECKLIST

CRITERIA	SATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY	COMMENT
Credibility			
Author information			
Organization's reputation			
Quality Control			
Accuracy			
Factual			
Up-to-date			
Truthful and detailed			
Reasonableness			
Balanced			
Logical presentation			
Unbiased attitude			
Lacks errors			
Support			
Documentary proof			
Links			
Contact information			
Putting it all Together			
<p>Credibility. If your source contains author or organizational information which shows that they are reputable and also contains evidence of peer or editorial review ...</p> <p>Accuracy. If the information is factual, up to date, truthful and detailed ...</p> <p>Reasonableness. If the viewpoint appears to be logically presented without bias or errors ...</p> <p>Support. If your source contains proof of its claims and links to other sources with contact information then ...</p>			
YOU MAY HAVE FOUND A RELIABLE SOURCE!			



Congratulations, you have completed your self-study package on analyzing a global issue. Complete the exercise in Section 3, in your own time, and then hand the completed package to the Training / Proficiency Level Officer who will record your result in your logbook and training record.