

Civic Online Reasoning

The Stanford History Education Group has created a Civic Online Reasoning Group to help students combat fake news online. Civic online reasoning is the ability to **locate, evaluate, and verify digital information** about social and political issues.

According to the Civic Online Reasoning Group, a project for the Stanford History Education Group, students make three big mistakes when it comes to evaluating the credulity of an online source:

1. **Accept Evidence Unquestioningly:** The appearance of evidence such as graphs, charts, infographics, photographs, and videos dominate students decisions about whether information is trustworthy. "Students often conclude that a post is trustworthy simply because it includes evidence to back its claims. What's the problem with this? Students do not stop to ask whether the evidence is trustworthy or sufficient to support the claims a site makes. The mere existence of evidence, the more the better, often does the trick."
2. **Focus on Surface Features:** Students focus too much on website surface features such as a site's URL, graphics, design, and "About" page. These features are easily manipulated by a site's creators.
3. **Misunderstanding Wikipedia:** Students have been taught to be sharply skeptical of Wikipedia. "Students are not aware of how Wikipedia regulates and monitors its content, from locking pages on many contentious issues to deploying bots to quickly correct vandalized pages." Some students are unaware that Wikipedia pages include links to valuable sources which are useful jumping off points for more in-depth research. Students distrust of Wikipedia can lead them astray.

The Civic Online Reasoning Group recommends that students ask and answer these questions of every online source:

1. **Who is behind it?**
2. **What is the evidence for its claims?**
3. **What do other sources say?**

These are the core competencies of civic online reasoning that have been identified through careful analysis.

This information comes from an article published in Social Education, September 2018 by Joel Breakstone, Sarah McGrew, Mark Smith, Teresa Ortega, and Sam Wineburg and can be accessed at

<https://www.socialstudies.org/publications/socialeducation/september2018/teaching-students-to-navigate-online-landscape>.

For more information about Civic Online Reasoning including lessons, assessments and more, go to <https://sheg.stanford.edu>.