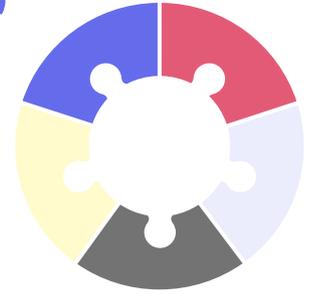# 50 Mini-Lessons For Teaching Students Research Skills
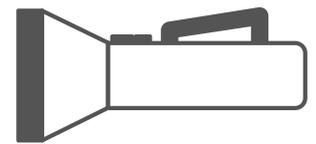
by Kathleen Morris

These activities are suitable for students from middle primary/elementary to senior high school. Find more details, links, and examples in this post.

http://www.kathleenamorris.com/2019/02/26/research-lessons

Clarify

What information are you looking for? Consider keywords, questions, synonyms, alternative phrases etc.

Choose a topic (e.g. koalas or Mt Everest) and write as many related **questions** as you can think of.

Make a digital or paper **mindmap** of a topic you're currently learning about.

Look up the **meaning** of 5 words you don't fully understand in an article or short book.

Look at an article with the title removed. Brainstorm possible **titles** that would fit the article.

Come up with a list of 5 different questions you could type into Google. Circle the **keywords**.

Write down 10 words to describe a person, place, or topic. Come up with **synonyms** for each word.

Write **pairs of synonyms** on post-it notes (prepared by students or the teacher). Each student in the class has one post-it note and walks around the classroom to find the person with the synonym to their word.

50 Mini-Lessons For Teaching Students Research Skills

Search

What are the best words you can type into the search engine to get the highest quality results?

Explore how to search Google using **voice**. List the pros and cons of searching with voice or text.

Test **two search engines** with the same query (e.g. Google and Bing). Do they give the same results?

Have all students work in pairs to try out a **different search engine**. Report back on pros and cons.

Compare two searches -- one using more **relevant keywords** than the other. Discuss the difference.

Try two searches where one phrase is in **quotation marks** and the other is not. Discuss the difference.

Write a question in Google with minor **spelling** or **punctuation errors**. What happens?

Try the **AGoogleADay.com** daily challenges for older students to improve their search skills.

Explore how Google uses **autocomplete** to suggest searches quickly. Try it out and discuss.

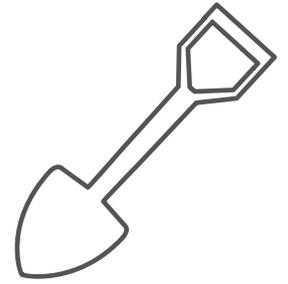Watch a Code.org video to learn more about **how search works** http://tiny.cc/searchvid

Have all students try a Google "**instant search**" and share with the class http://tiny.cc/instant-search

Experiment with typing some questions into Google that have a clear answer. Look at the different ways the **answers are displayed instantly** within the search results -- dictionary definitions, image cards, graphs etc.

50 Mini-Lessons For Teaching Students Research Skills

Delve

What search results should you click on and explore further?

Discuss the video **How Does Google Know Everything About Me?** http://tiny.cc/googlevid

List/research popular **domains**. Discuss if any may be more reliable than others *(e.g. .gov or .edu).*

Discuss (or research) ways to open Google search results in a **new tab** to save your original search results.

Try out a few Google searches and look for **advertisements** within the search results. Where are they?

Look at ways to **filter** search results by the tabs at the top of the page *(i.e. news, images, maps).*

Type a question into Google and explore the **"People also ask"** and **"Searches related to..."** sections.

Try filtering search results by **time** *(tools > any time > past month or past year etc.)*

Create and annotate an **"anatomy of a search result"** example like the one below.

Visit Melbourne - Melbourne Zoo | Zoos Victoria ← website title
https://www.zoo.org.au/melbourne ▾ ← URL
Journey through a world of wildlife in the heart of Melbourne. ← description/tagline

Plan your visit
Zoo map - Getting here - Keeper Talks - Where to eat - Accessibility

Close-up Encounters
Melbourne Zoo's Close-up Encounters will bring you face ...

Animals ← sitelinks
Find out more about our zoo animals at Melbourne Zoo.

Buy tickets
Buy tickets to Werribee · Buy tickets to Melbourne · Buy ...

What's on
New exhibits, events and programs at Melbourne Zoo.

Wild encounters
Experience the thrill of a Wild Encounter at Melbourne Zoo ...

More results from zoo.org.au » ← brings up additional listings

Evaluate

Once you click on a link and land on a site, how do you know if it offers the information you need?

Read two articles on the same topic. Make a **Venn diagram** comparing the similarities and differences.

Use the New York Times' **What's Going On in This Graph?** series to instigate classroom discussions.

Discuss images stripped of captions on **What's Going On In This Picture?** by The New York Times.
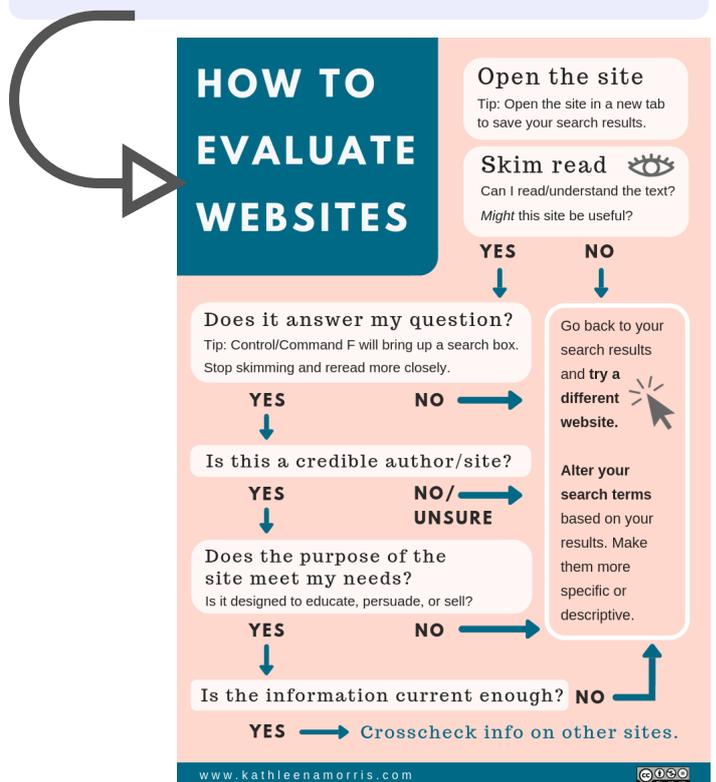
Look at a news website together as a class or in pairs. Identify all the **advertisements**.

Explore the **fake sites** listed on Eric Curts' website. Can students tell if they're true? http://tiny.cc/fakesites

Discuss this **flowchart**. Read more and get a PDF version here http://tiny.cc/flowchart-poster

Look at a **fact checking** prompt from Mike Caulfield's Four Moves site https://fourmoves.blog

Practice **skim reading** -- give students one minute to read a short article. Discuss what stood out. Headings? Bold words? Quotes? Then give students ten minutes to read the same article and discuss **deep reading.**

HOW TO EVALUATE WEBSITES

Open the site
Tip: Open the site in a new tab to save your search results.

Skim read 👁
Can I read/understand the text?
Might this site be useful?

YES · NO

Does it answer my question?
Tip: Control/Command F will bring up a search box. Stop skimming and reread more closely.

YES · NO

Is this a credible author/site?

YES · NO/UNSURE

Does the purpose of the site meet my needs?
Is it designed to educate, persuade, or sell?

YES · NO

Is the information current enough? NO

YES → Crosscheck info on other sites.

Go back to your search results and **try a different website.**

Alter your search terms based on your results. Make them more specific or descriptive.

www.kathleenamorris.com

50 Mini-Lessons For Teaching Students Research Skills

Cite

How can you write information in your own words (paraphrase or summarise), use direct quotes, and cite sources?

Watch the video **Citation for Beginners**. Discuss the key points. http://tiny.cc/citationvid

Look up the **definition of plagiarism** using a variety of sources. Define as a class.

Find an interesting video on YouTube and write a brief **summary** in your own words.

Have students pair up and tell each other about their weekend. Then have the listener try to **retell**.

Read a well known fairy tale. Have students write a short **summary** in their own words. Compare versions.

Try out **CitationGenerator.com** -- a handy free tool without ads that helps you create citations quickly.

Create class examples for one form of citation from **Kathy Schrock's Guide** http://tiny.cc/schrock

List things that are **okay and not okay** to do when researching, e.g. copy from a website.

Read a short article and create a summary that would be considered **plagiarism** and one that would not.
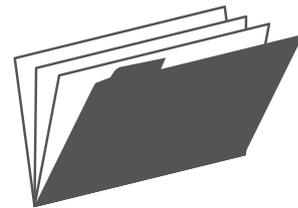
Investigate the difference between **paraphrasing** and **summarising**. Create a Venn diagram to compare.

Write statements on the board that might be true or false (*e.g. The current marathon world record is 2 hours, 7 minutes*). Have students research these statements and decide whether they're true by sharing their **citations**.

Staying Organised

How can you keep the valuable information you find online organised as you go through the research process?

List and discuss ways you can **take notes** while researching *(e.g. Google Docs, Google Keep, paper etc.).* Discuss pros and cons for each.

Learn the **keyboard shortcuts** to help manage tabs *(e.g. open new tab, reopen closed tab, go to next tab etc.).*

Find a collection of resources on a topic and curate them in a **Wakelet** (https://wakelet.com).

Listen to a short podcast or watch a brief video on a certain topic and **sketchnote** your ideas.

Learn how to use **split screen** to have one window open with your research, and another open with your notes *(e.g. a Google spreadsheet, Google Doc, Microsoft Word or OneNote etc.).*

I hope this resource has been useful to you. If you have any comments or additional information to share, please get in touch! Use the contact form on my blog (www.kathleenamorris.com) or tweet me (@kathleen_morris).