

The Critical Thinking About Sources Cookbook, edited by Sarah E. Morris

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Special Focus on Refusing Crisis Narratives

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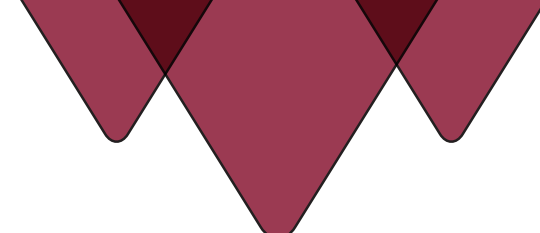
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Book Review: *The Critical Thinking About Sources Cookbook*

Sarah E. Morris, ed. *The Critical Thinking About Sources Cookbook*. Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2020, 217 pp., \$50.00.

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The Critical Thinking About Sources Cookbook, edited by Sarah Morris, Head of Instruction at Emory University Libraries, represents the sixth volume in the ACRL Library Cookbook series. Noting the complexity of the online information ecosystem and the crucial need for students to learn critical thinking skills, Morris aims to provide “resources, ideas and inspiration around . . . the complex and sprawling topic of sources.” Intended for academic and school librarians, as well as other educators, this book “boasts a rich array of ideas” for enhancing critical thinking skills and empowering students to find, evaluate, and use information (vii–viii).

The *Cookbook* distributes ninety-six lesson plan “recipes” between two sections, Consuming Information (sixty-six lessons) and Producing and Distributing Information (thirty lessons). Consuming Information comprises four subsections: Evaluating Information, Working with Popular Sources, Recognizing Scholarly Sources, and Dealing with Misinformation, containing twelve, fifteen, twenty-two, and seventeen lesson plans, respectively. Producing and Distributing Information includes three subsections: Examining Production Techniques and Norms, Exploring Information Ecosystems and Distribution Methods, and Navigating Information Online, with nine, ten, and eleven lessons in turn.

As with other ACRL cookbooks, recipes contain the following parts: nutrition information (justification and goals), learning outcomes, cooking time (length of the instructional session), number served (optimal number of students), dietary guidelines (standards like the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*), ingredients and equipment (computers, ancillary materials, etc.), preparation (pre-instructional activities), cooking method (the instructional session itself), allergy



warning (instructional caveats), and chef's notes (alternative formats or methods for different groups). "Cooking times" vary from fifteen minutes to a week, with forty-nine lessons timed at fifty minutes or less, thirty-four between fifty and seventy-five minutes, and thirteen over seventy-five minutes. These timings reflect the context of most information literacy instruction; that is, one-shot instruction in fifty- or seventy-five-minute class sessions. Only six recipes indicate preparation times. Some lessons require preparatory activities such as creating research guides, lectures, worksheets, or videos that are clearly time consuming, especially for one-shot instruction. "Number served" varies, with fifty-three lessons targeting classes of up to thirty students, thirteen addressing classes of up to forty students, four aimed at larger groups (fifty, seventy-five, and 100 students), and twenty-six that do not specify a desirable class size. Finally, only twenty-four of the recipes specify a target audience. Sixteen of these lesson plans reflect the location of most information literacy instruction in lower-division—usually freshman level—general education courses, especially freshman English composition and First Year Experience. Three lessons situate instruction in beginning disciplinary courses (history, nursing, and science), while four specifically address upper-level students, and one is earmarked for graduate students.

The lesson plans are inquiry-based, feature group work, and use active learning techniques. They stress student discovery and construction of knowledge, with librarians serving as "guides on the side." Most recipes orient themselves to the Information Has Value and Authority Is Constructed and Contextual frames of the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*. For example, "Yams and Sweet Potatoes, Jams and Jellies: Differentiating Between Popular and Scholarly Sources" by Helene Gold grounds learning in students' prior experience of information resources and provides effective discussion prompts and questions, especially about information cost, profit, and advertising. There are additional discussion questions for more advanced students, as well as suggestions for building humour into the instruction (17–18). Other valuable lessons in the first section encourage students to associate the utility and quality of sources with their information needs rather than automatically attributing value only to scholarly sources. The cookbook contains an eclectic mix of lessons using established lists of evaluative criteria such as the CRAAP Test or in-house evaluation criteria, and lessons that avoid librarian-created evaluative checklists entirely in favour of professional media standards, rhetorical standards, or student-generated criteria. Some lesson plans are engagingly written, for instance, Pamela Nett Kruger and Adrienne Scott's "Cooking from Your Pantry: Using Inquiry to Evaluate and Understand Primary Sources," which introduces primary source literacy thus: "As you eat at the table of history, be sure to remember that someone else has set the table."

Dare to wonder about the context of this history” (40). This lesson is one of several with a social justice orientation, encouraging students to develop a sensitivity to missing or muted perspectives in information sources. Finally, “recipes” that include formative assessment such as Candace K. Vance’s “Taste Test: Primary vs. Secondary Sources,” are particularly valuable in providing useful feedback on the effectiveness of instruction (50–51).

The cookbook’s second, smaller section, Producing and Distributing Information, introduces students to “synthesizing sources, how different types of sources are produced, how technology mediates experiences with information, economics of information ecosystems, and creating/sharing information” (vii–viii). In these inventive, hands-on lessons, students transcend the information consumption typically taught during information literacy sessions to create, adapt, and synthesize information in various formats (textual and visual) and for various purposes (from academic to social media). These lessons rely on the Authority and Value frames, as well as the Information Creation as a Process frame. They encourage students to consider their research context, the economics of information, and the parameters of information creation and manipulation in associating value with information sources. Some recipes contain formative assessments such as three-two-one responses, reflective essays, and reteaching. The best lessons in this section engage critical pedagogy in support of social justice matters. For instance, Silvia Vong’s “Communicating Research Three Ways: Critically Reflecting on Access and Privilege,” functions to reveal issues of power, access, and exclusion associated with information creation and use (156–157).

Use of this cookbook is complicated by issues of access and organization. Since there is no index (as is, unfortunately, typical of the ACRL Library Cookbook series), anyone seeking a lesson for a specific context must page through the table of contents or delve into the recipes themselves to find it. However, lesson plans are not always found in the sections to which they seemingly should be assigned. For instance, “Primary/Secondary Mixed Grill,” located in “Working with Popular Sources,” seems to focus on scholarly sources (46–47). An index encompassing audience, context, time (including preparation, session length, and post-session work), and topics covered would enhance the usefulness of this otherwise valuable collection of critical thinking activities.