

Warm up

Introduce students to the idea of evaluating texts. Elicit the various reasons we might want to do this. The list is long, but you could prompt, if necessary, with:

- to see if a text might contain useful information for writing an essay
- to check if a text will further your knowledge of a subject
- to model your own writing style on a text
- to get a quick impression of the quality/stance of texts offered by a website or publication
- to make a judgement on whether a book/author is worth reading

Mention the phenomenon of fake news, and initiate a discussion about how we often see news stories or advertisements that are not what they claim to be. Ask students to tell you how you would spot a piece of fake news or suspicious advertising. Elicit or prompt with ideas such as wild, unsubstantiated claims, biased writing, inaccurate information, missing information, sensationalist or emotional language, etc. There is no need to compile an exhaustive list, as these things are covered in the Worksheet and the Factsheet.

Discuss how evaluating texts relates to academic skills. (We need to evaluate a text for any of the reasons listed above; we need to check the credibility of a text; etc.) Explain that students are going to learn a few basic techniques for quickly evaluating a text. This skill, you should explain, will not only help ensure accuracy in their research, but it will also save a lot of valuable reading time as they learn to quickly dismiss texts that have little or nothing to offer.

Using the Factsheet

There are three possible ways to use the Factsheet:

- 1 Give students the Factsheet before the lesson, so they can read it at home and come to the lesson prepared to do the Worksheet. If you use this approach, start the lesson by checking that all students have read and understood the Factsheet, and answer any questions.
- 2 Give students the Factsheet at the beginning of the lesson and start by working through it with the students.
- 3 Focus on the Worksheet in the lesson, then give students the Factsheet at the end of the lesson, so they can take it home and keep it as a reference or revision tool.

Theory to practice

Suggested answers

- 1 The heading suggests the text may be serious, but it is probably not academic.
- 2 It looks like a blog entry or a letter to the editor of a local newspaper.
- 3 The second sentence conveys the writer's contempt/disgust for the number of shopping malls.
- 4 Gazing into a crystal ball is not a reliable way to forecast, so the writer is being very subjective.
- 5 The writer is saying that the mall will fail fairly quickly, and that the town will be left with an empty mall and no countryside. It is possible that this will happen – it has happened in other places – but we cannot be sure of this based purely on the writer's viewpoint.
- 6 These are emotional words; they tell us the writing is subjective.
- 7 The text is mostly opinion-based and conjectural. There are no facts after the first sentence.
- 8 This text would probably be of no use in an academic essay. It does present a strong impression of the strength of feeling experienced by at least some members of this community, so it could be used to convey this.

Using the Worksheet

- Ask students to read the information at the top of the page. Reassure them that they have already had plenty of practice in this skill, because in their English studies they have been reading and evaluating texts for years. Check that everyone understands before moving on to the exercises.

Practice

Note: As far as possible, encourage students to use English in their answers. However, since some of the concepts here are quite advanced, sometimes it might be necessary to allow them to use their native language – providing you can speak it, too!

1 Read the text and answer the questions about it.

- Allow up to five minutes for students to read the text. Answer any questions they may have, but limit these to vocabulary so that you can approach the questions in the task as a class with everyone having understood the text.
- Do item **a** with the students so that everyone knows what to do. Point out that it only requires them to look at the heading. Starting with the first part of the question, ask students to tell you what we understand about global warming from the heading alone. If they have difficulty, prompt with: *Why do you think the writer uses quotes for the phrase 'global warming'?* Point out that sometimes this is a device writers use when they are being ironic or dismissive. (Students may have seen characters on TV using 'air quotes' with two fingers of both hands to express the same thing.) Elicit that the writer's view of global warming is that she doesn't think it is a valid phenomenon. You may want to explain further by saying that we can do this another way using *so-called*. Write the following on the board: *Everybody's talking about this so-called global warming.* Underline *so-called* and explain that it questions or challenges the seriousness of the thing that follows it (*global warming* in this case).
- Do the second part of item **a** in a similar way with the class. Prompt, if necessary with: *What kind of government 'panics' and lets the economy 'sink without a trace'?* Elicit that the writer has a very low opinion of the government.
- Allow up to five minutes for students to do questions 2-6. Ideally, they should work alone, but if you sense that they are having difficulty understanding, allow them to work in pairs.
- **Note:** For the questions on the Worksheet, the answers may be expressed in a variety of ways. These Teacher's notes contain suggested answers. The answers your students give may differ, but still be good answers. Encourage them to explain themselves as best they can, and use the opportunity for discussion where possible.

Suggested answers

- a** She is dismissive of global warming.
She doesn't support the government.
- b** 2
- c** 'environment' – She suggests the environment is not worth this amount of trouble.
'experts' – She doubts their authority.
'climate change professors' – She doubts their authority; she mocks them or makes fun of them.
'eco-warriors' – She mocks them; she casts doubt on their integrity.
- d** destroyed, whim, ridiculous, barmy, panic, wild, silly, scaremongers
- e** The text is very much opinion-based, rather than fact-based.
- f**
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | X |
| 2 | ✓ |
| 3 | ✓ |
| 4 | X |
| 5 | X |

2 Imagine you found the text in Exercise 1 as part of your research on the environment and the economy. Fill in the table with the writer's points.

- Explain the task. Ask students to imagine they are studying something to do with the economy / fossil fuels / the environment, etc. In gathering material to write an essay, they come across the article in Exercise 1.
- Make sure students understand that the points on the left of the table are not the writer's – they are typical opposing arguments to the writer's viewpoint.
- Allow a few minutes for students to work alone and try to extract the writer's points and fill in the table with them. Reassure students that the way they express their answers is not critical, just so long as they find some of the points.

If, after a period of time, students don't seem to have found four or five points, allow them to compare notes with a partner.

- When you have elicited the answers, ask students to tell you whether they think the writer is wrong in her views. The aim here is to get students to think about the features of the text that suggest the writer's points are invalid. Some students might agree with the writer, of course – if so, you will need to negotiate this section carefully. Is the writer basically wrong in a *factual* way – or is the way she expresses herself part of what makes the text unreliable? Who is the writer targeting, and does she do this in a way that is fair? Whose interests does she defend? You might want to particularly focus on questioning the writer's focus only on one country, and her claim to be defending the interests of 'homes, jobs and a good education' for 'normal, hard-working people'. It's possible to infer from this that the writer is probably fairly privileged and lives in a country which is not going to suffer greatly from global warming, at least in the short term. Exercise 3 asks students to look at ways to make the writer's points more credible, so this discussion can act as a springboard.

Suggested answers

- The coal industry is dead. / The oil and gas sectors are dying.
- There is too much red tape. / There are too many rules.
- The economy is being destroyed.
- Global warming is not real. / The weather changes anyway.
- We have other priorities. / We need to focus on homes, jobs and education.

3 Some of the points the writer makes in the text in Exercise 1 are not exactly wrong. Some people would agree strongly with them. What would need to happen for the writer to be taken more seriously?

- Make sure students understand the question, and that the views expressed by the writer are not necessarily *wrong* – but they *are* the opinions of one person, who may have a particular bias. (See the notes for Exercise 2.) Remind them that they are doing this Worksheet to learn to evaluate a text for academic study. Deciding whether or not to take a writer seriously, in practice, involves more than just the factual content of the writer's opinions. With this in mind, ask them to think of ways this text could be made more credible.
- Allow a minute or two for students to think about the question on their own. Then, if you prefer, you can put them in pairs or small groups to combine their ideas and note them down.

Suggested answer

The writer needs to back up her opinions with statistics, evidence or references. If the more emotional language was removed, that would also help. The tone of the writing is dismissive, which takes away any resemblance to serious academic writing, so it needs to be written in a more formal and respectful style. The writer is clearly defending the interests of a particular country, and the reference to the 'average person' is biased towards people with a certain level of economic privilege, so the writer should probably at least acknowledge the wide range of people and countries she is not interested in.

Reflect

4 Write your own checklist. Include the top five questions you should ask yourself when evaluating a text. Compare your list with another student.

- Encourage students to think about the ideas they have covered on this Worksheet. Point out that they can find ideas that they might like to use in their own checklists on the Factsheet.
- Remember that your students' needs might be different, depending on what they study. Encourage them to share and compare these differences.
- Explain that it doesn't matter if they end up with four or six questions – the main idea here is to give them time to reflect on what they have learnt, and compile a shortlist of what they consider to be the *main* questions.
- After a suitable length of time, encourage them to share their checklists with other students and with you. Point out that there are no right or wrong answers, and encourage discussion as much as possible.

5  **Look back at the text in Exercise 1. Has your opinion of the text changed as a result of the work you have done on this Worksheet? With another student, discuss what you have learnt.**

- Ask students if they remember what they thought of the text when they first read it. In most cases, their views will have changed since then. Encourage them to talk about this, firstly with a partner, and then as a class.
- Remind students that this academic skill improves with experience, so the more reading they do – even if it is not related to their studies – the more they will develop their ability to evaluate.
- Finally, encourage students to have their checklist with them the next time they read a text as part of their studies. Remind them to ask the questions in their checklists as they read. Encourage them to report their experiences back to you, and to tell you whether they have been able to access useful points in a text more easily and/or quickly. This will give them the opportunity to check what they have learnt under SMART conditions (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound*), and they will be able to see their own progress.