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Identifying & Evaluating Sources

Students sit in small groups of two or three and work as a team to identify and locate the original health and nutrition research being reported on in various popular media reports. This activity typically includes some popular media pieces in which the research being described leads students to research articles that are available for free, other pieces that lead to research available exclusively via library databases, and some which lead to information that was not published in a journal at all, but is instead grey literature or another type of research report. Along the way, we talk about how and why the articles ended up in the places that we found them, and what information provided by the news story was most useful in helping track the article down. Sample blurbs can be located in popular magazines such as “Food Network Magazine” included below. Plan ahead to find a variety of examples to suit your needs.

1. Connecting to scholarly research using popular health and wellness “blurbs”:

Contents

To Your Health

Here's what's extra good for you in this month's issue:

12 DINNERS UNDER 500 CALORIES

This month, every meal in our Weeknight Cooking section is low-calorie. Here's a preview:



Steak-Peppercorn Salad
pg. 90

CALORIES:
425



Soy-Maple Salmon
pg. 92

CALORIES:
392



Ham and Vegetable Gratin
pg. 94

CALORIES:
392



Tofu Cuban Sandwiches
pg. 98

CALORIES:
497



Mexican Eggs with Chorizo
pg. 100

CALORIES:
406



Chili Sweet Potatoes
pg. 103

CALORIES:
444

AT THEIR PEAK

Lemons are loaded with good stuff: Just one provides about half your recommended daily intake of vitamin C, plus vitamin B and potassium. Squeeze some into your diet this month:

- Add flavor to the turkey and barley dish on page 98: The recipe calls for lemon zest and juice.
- Marinate the steak on page 123 in a lemon juice-olive oil mixture.
- Try Melissa d'Arabian's chicken on page 55—she uses lemons to flavor the sauce and spinach.

Get Cultured!

Eating yogurt every three days could cut your risk of developing high blood pressure by up to 31 percent, says a Tufts University study. These recipes are a fun way to get your fill.



Top the stewed chicken on page 94 with a dollop of yogurt.

Treat yourself to the lemon-yogurt mousse on page 121.

Serve yogurt with the spicy mushrooms on page 56.

GOOD TO KNOW

Recent research from the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* finds that piperine, a substance in **black pepper**, may help prevent the formation of fat cells. Add a few extra grinds to Bobby Deen's lightened-up chicken-fried steak (page 110).



Sample discussion questions to ask the class, or add to an in-class worksheet:

- In order to find the research discussed in each of these blurbs, what do we need to know? What DO we know?
- Where was the study published? When?
- Have you ever heard of (Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry)? Who reads it? Why? How do they get access to it? Can you find it online?
- What about that study by (Tufts University)?

Once you've discussed the questions above, invite the students to search for articles. I DO NOT tell students how to find the articles, but I do walk around and make suggestions. (Some go right to Google, some start with the library website.) It can be fun to give first group to find the article a small prize and ask them to demonstrate the steps they took to locate the full-text. I ask if other students employed different strategies.

When students using Google find articles that are behind paywalls, I ask questions like:

- How much does access to the article cost? How much is a subscription to a year's worth of articles? Why does it cost so much compared to Food Network Magazine (or what popular media source you are using? Does our library have a subscription? How can you find it?

I find this naturally leads to a discussion of ways to use the library website (and Google) to find articles.

Other discussion questions:

- Do you think there are more journals out there like Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry? How would you find articles on how black pepper and other spices impact human health if you didn't know it this publication existed?
- What is a journal, anyway? (If you have a collection of print academic journals for students to examine, this can be a good time to examine what a print journal looks like.)
- Is there a way we can search through many specialized journals at once while making sure we don't get too many distracting or irrelevant results? (Use this question to launch into accessing databases like Pubmed, Health Source Nursing Academic, etc.)
- Based on the title of the research article we found, what other words might you consider using when searching a database? (Leads to a more natural discussion on how to employ Boolean logic in a database.)

I like to use Food Network Magazine because the blurbs are very short, and because I have a personal subscription. This gives me an opportunity to connect to students by revealing something about myself, and tell a funny story about how my mom responded to a "Buy one, get one free," subscription offer. I also ask questions such as, How many of your get magazines mailed to you? How many of your parents get magazine subscriptions? How many of you have heard of the Food Network? Discussing how cheap popular magazines can be (free!) makes it interesting to when you circle back when you talk about academic journals.