



Guide & Exercises for Educators and School Librarians Using NewsGuard in a News Literacy Lesson

Guide Outline

- Pages 2 - 9: Background on NewsGuard and News Literacy Discussion
- Pages 10 - 12: Suggested Exercises
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What is NewsGuard?

NewsGuard is a free tool for assessing online sources and teaching news literacy. NewsGuard’s team of experienced journalists rate and review thousands of news and information websites to help readers know which websites they can generally trust—and which they should not.

How does NewsGuard review websites?

Each website is rated using nine standards of credibility and transparency. A full “Nutrition Label” review explains each rating and discusses the site’s ownership, financing, content, credibility, transparency, and history.

Why is NewsGuard relevant?

As misinformation spreads online and distrust in the media rises, it’s increasingly important for students to understand the news they encounter on social media and in their search browsers. NewsGuard can help by equipping people with more context for what they read online.

Who should use this guide?

Educators and librarians in middle school, high school, and higher education teaching news literacy to students in a course on civics, writing, journalism, or another subject. This guide helps students use NewsGuard as a resource as they develop the skills to assess online information on their own.

What are the outcomes?

This guide is aligned with [the Common Core](#) anchor standards and the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE) standards for technology use, articulated in full on page 13.

How do you access NewsGuard’s reviews?

NewsGuard offers a free desktop browser extension for [Chrome](#), [Edge](#), [Firefox](#), and [Safari](#). After installing the extension, NewsGuard’s red and green icons appear next to headlines in social media feeds and search results. Hovering over the icon reveals a short description of the website and a link to access the full “Nutrition Label” review of the site.





















NewsGuard

Introduction to NewsGuard

- [NewsGuard](#) was launched in March 2018 by veteran journalists Steven Brill and Gordon Crovitz to tackle the problem of false information and misinformation online.
- As tech companies relied on algorithms and artificial intelligence to try to address the problem, the two saw the need for human intelligence to be part of the solution.
- NewsGuard employs experienced journalists who have reviewed all the news and information websites that account for more than 90% of online engagement in the U.S., in English, using [nine criteria](#) for credibility and transparency
- Unlike fact-checking, which addresses controversial individual stories only after they have spread online, NewsGuard reviews websites as a whole based on their general reliability.

NewsGuard’s “Nutrition Label” Reviews

- NewsGuard analyzes each site using nine journalistic standards of credibility and transparency.
- Each review starts with the premise that a site should be **green** until an evaluation, based on those nine criteria, produces a **red** rating.
- Each of the nine criteria is assigned a certain number of points, adding up to 100. A website that scores less than 60 points is rated red.
- Some criteria are worth more than others. For example, a website that repeatedly publishes false content loses more points than a site that does not provide information about the people creating its content. A table explaining the weight of points is available on [NewsGuard’s website](#).
- Each site has a “Nutrition Label” that explains its rating by describing the site’s adherence to the nine criteria by reviewing its ownership, financing, content, credibility, transparency, and history.
- Not all sites rated **green** are equal, nor are all sites rated **red**. There is a wide variety in quality within the categories of green and red. A site can fail a few criteria but still receive a green overall, and a site can pass a few criteria but still receive a red. Users should consult the full Nutrition Label and criteria checklist in addition to a site’s overall rating.
- Each rating and Nutrition Label undergoes a formal process of review, detailed on [NewsGuard’s website](#).
- Ratings and labels are regularly updated, and NewsGuard lists the names and email addresses of the writers and editors who review each site.

	OR	
 Does not repeatedly publish false content		
 Gathers and presents information responsibly		
 Regularly corrects or clarifies errors		
 Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly		
 Avoids deceptive headlines		
 Website discloses ownership and financing		
 Clearly labels advertising		
 Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest		
 Provides information about content creators		

Using NewsGuard's Browser Extension

- Install the free NewsGuard desktop browser extension on [Chrome](#), [Edge](#), [Firefox](#), or [Safari](#).
- Once installed, links in social media feeds and on search results will appear with an icon indicating how NewsGuard has rated the underlying site. Icons appear in the upper right corner of websites as well.
- Hovering over the icon reveals a short description of the site and a link to read the full Nutrition Label. The icon is a quick indication of the nature of a website, and users should read the label fully to understand the site.

The screenshot shows a browser window with the search query "What is fracking?". On the left, a NewsGuard extension overlay for "what-is-fracking.com" is visible. It features a red warning icon and the text: "Proceed with caution: This website generally fails to maintain basic standards of accuracy and accountability." Below this, a paragraph describes the site as an information website promoting fracking, owned and operated by the American Petroleum Institute. A link to "See the full Nutrition Label" is provided. The NewsGuard logo is at the bottom of the overlay.

The search results on the right include:

- What is Fracking?** (what-is-fracking.com/) - Learn how fracking uses water to extract oil and natural gas from shale plays, why fracking is an economic and energy security solution, and where fracking is ...
- What is fracking – and why is it so controversial? - Fracking ... - Vox** (https://www.vox.com/cards/fracking/what-is-fracking) - "Fracking" is short for "hydraulic fracturing" – it's a process by which water, sand, and chemicals are injected underground at very high pressures to crack open ...
- Facts About Fracking - Live Science** (https://www.livescience.com › Planet Earth) - Feb 9, 2018 - Hydraulic fracturing, commonly called **fracking**, is a drilling technique used for extracting oil or natural gas from deep underground.
- Why is fracking bad? You asked Google – here's the answer | Opinion ...** (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/.../why-is-fracking-bad-google-answer) - Aug 19, 2015 - **Fracking** technology has transformed the US energy landscape in the last decade with geopolitical ramifications. Photograph: Les Stone/Corbis.

Nutrition Label (partial)

what-is-fracking.com

An information website promoting fracking, a controversial process for removing oil and gas from the earth. The site presents itself as an objective source of information, and barely discloses that it is owned and operated by the American Petroleum Institute, the oil and gas industry's leading trade association. Information appears not to have been updated since 2012.

Ownership and Financing	What-is-fracking.com is owned and operated by the American Petroleum Institute (API), the oil and gas industry's leading trade association.
Content	The site divides content into several topics, including Economic Impact, Environment, Public Health, and Land Use. Each topic is divided into a series of questions and answers, such as "Why is fracking for natural gas important?" and "What are fracking myths?" Every answer portrays fracking in a positive light. In fact, there is much debate over these issues, with opponents arguing that fracking can cause earthquakes and contaminate groundwater and that fracking should be more tightly regulated. The home page promises that viewers can "Learn how fracking uses water to extract oil and natural gas from shale plays, why fracking is an economic and energy solution, and where fracking is safely taking place in America."
Credibility	As a trade association, API represents the interests of its members, the country's oil and natural gas companies. The absence of clear disclosure of its interest means that readers cannot easily know who controls this website or whose vested interests the website represents in the ongoing debate over fracking.

Proceed with caution: This website generally fails to maintain basic standards of accuracy and accountability.

- Does not repeatedly publish false content**
- Gathers and presents information responsibly**
- Regularly corrects or clarifies errors**
- Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly**
- Avoids deceptive headlines**
- Website discloses ownership and financing**
- N/A** **Clearly labels advertising**
- Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest**
- Provides information about content creators**

Understanding the two badges:



Proceed with caution: This website generally fails to maintain basic standards of accuracy and accountability.

A site with a **red** badge lacks credibility or transparency in important areas and should generally not be trusted as the primary source of information. Users should always independently verify information on **red** sites, and if they feel there is a compelling case for citing a **red** site, they should be able to clearly articulate why.



This website generally maintains basic standards of accuracy and accountability.

A site with a **green** badge can generally be trusted, but not all sites rated **green** are equal. A **green** site may still lack credibility or transparency in certain key areas. Users should read the full nutrition label to understand any shortcomings of the site that might impact whether they should trust the story they're consulting.

Additional badges:



This is a satire or humor website. It is not an actual news source.

A website intended to entertain. Unlike a false news website that is intentionally deceiving, a satirical website is upfront about its nature, or widely known to be a parody. A common example is The Onion. Much like a **red** website, a **pink** website should typically not be consulted as the primary source of information, unless there is a compelling reason for citing it.



This website publishes content from its users that it does not vet. Information from this source may not be reliable.

A platform, such as Wikipedia or YouTube, where users produce content that might not be edited or vetted for accuracy. Students should evaluate the user uploading content to the platform, and the sources they use. Students should always independently verify information on the platform using reputable sources.



This website is still in the process of being rated by NewsGuard.

Stay tuned: NewsGuard's team of journalists is currently in the process of reviewing this website.



(or no badge displayed)

When a white badge appears in the upper right hand corner of a website, or no badge appears next to a link, it indicates that NewsGuard has not yet rated the site, nor will NewsGuard rate it any time soon. If there is a compelling reason for NewsGuard to assess a website, users should click on the icon and submit it for review.

Reading a Nutrition Label

The sections of a Nutrition Label:

- **Ownership and Financing:** Names a site's owner and describes how it is financed.
- **Content:** Describes the type of stories, videos, and other information that a reader will encounter on a site. Also explains if the site reflects an ideology.
- **Credibility:** Illustrates whether a site's reporting is credible, and explains why it may have received a **red X** for any credibility criteria.
- **Transparency:** Describes how much information a site provides about itself, and explains why it may have received a **red X** for any transparency criteria.
- **History:** Provides context for how long a website has been around, why it was started, and what changes it may have undergone over the years.
- **Sources:** Contains a full list of sources, organized by section, to support each fact stated in the Nutrition Label. Users can consult the source list to verify statements made in the label.
- **Authors:** Each label names the analysts and editors that reviewed that website, providing their bio and email address for anyone with questions or concerns.

eonline.com	
The online extension of E!, a 24-hour cable TV entertainment news channel, is produced by E! Entertainment Television, which covers entertainment news.	
Ownership and Financing	The site is owned by NBCUniversal Inc., one of the world's largest telecommunications companies.
Content	Eonline.com publishes stories, photos, and entertainment news, as well as content from television shows like "Keeping up with the Kardashians" for coverage of celebrity events and award shows. It also features photo galleries and fashion reviews posts. It has sections on red carpet events, original film news, and celebrity lifestyles, including fitness. A livestream of the cable TV channel is available for subscribers.
Credibility	Text and video stories are produced by staff writers. Celebrity news by quoting unnamed sources has learned ... It has also relied on second-hand reports, along with sites like TMZ that often report without much elaboration. Headlines speak in tabloid gossip style: "Up for a Selfie at Colosseum in Rome," "Celebrate at Baby Shower with Kim Kardashian."
Transparency	The site does not provide information about its authors. Biographies can be found on the NBCUniversal website. Comments at the end of each news story have a feedback link, but does not make clear how to use it. Editors at Eonline.com and representatives at E! Entertainment Television.

NewsGuard's Criteria: Credibility

1. Does Not Repeatedly Publish False Content

NewsGuard's Standard: In the last three years the site has not produced multiple stories that have been found—either by journalists at NewsGuard or elsewhere—to be clearly false, and which have not been quickly and prominently corrected.

- While many websites periodically make errors, sites that do not promptly correct those errors may be intentionally trying to misinform readers.
 - False stories can range from conspiracy theories to inaccurate health claims.
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2. Gathers and Presents Information Responsibly

NewsGuard's Standard: Content on the site is created by reporters, writers, videographers, researchers, or other information providers who generally seek to be accurate and fair in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information, even if they approach their work from a strong point of view. They do this by referencing multiple sources, preferably those that present direct, firsthand information on a subject or event.

- **Gathering information:** News websites may use a range of different methods:
 - **Original reporting:** journalists conduct original interviews and collect information directly from the source.
 - **Aggregation:** writers pull information from a variety of different sources.
 - **Wire services:** websites can publish stories directly from other news outlets, such as Reuters and the Associated Press, which provide content for use.
 - **Anonymous sources:** journalists speak to individuals who prefer not to be named in print, sometimes to protect themselves and their job. Using anonymous sources is controversial, as readers are unable to verify whether the information is true. Many news outlets only use anonymous sources if they can independently verify the information using at least two sources, typically only in exceptional cases.
- **Presenting information:** Writers who present information responsibly do not misstate facts, misquote sources, violate journalistic ethics, or distort information by cherry picking or omitting key details.

3. Regularly Corrects or Clarifies Errors

NewsGuard’s Standard: The site makes clear how to contact those in charge and has effective practices for publishing clarifications and corrections.

- Even the most conscientious news outlets make mistakes. Correcting errors is what separates responsible sites from those that purposely spread false information.
- **Corrections:** When a site updates a story to fix a mistake. An explanation of the change often appears at the top or bottom of an article, or in a separate “corrections” section of the website, often labeled “correction,” “clarification,” “update,” or “editor’s note.”
- **Retractions:** When a site removes a story from its site. The site might publish a retraction, indicating the story was taken down to avoid spreading false information. Other sites might remove a story without notice to remove any evidence of the issue.

4. Handles the Difference Between News and Opinion Responsibly

NewsGuard’s Standard: Content providers who convey the impression that they report news, or a mix of news and opinion, distinguish opinion from news reporting, and when reporting news, they do not regularly or egregiously misstate, distort, or cherry pick facts, or egregiously cherry pick stories, to advance opinions. Content providers whose clearly expressed purpose is to advance a particular point of view do not regularly and egregiously misstate or distort facts to make their case.

- Some websites only publish opinion stories, and others only publish the news. Most sites, however, fall somewhere in the middle, publishing news reports as well as commentary pieces. When credible news sites publish opinion stories or editorials, they usually reside in a separate section, or are labeled as such.
- All sites approach their reporting from some point of view – even those that attempt to report straightforward news, such as Reuters and The Associated Press. Some websites are more explicitly opinionated than others, such as HuffPost and The Daily Caller. A site might state its point of view in an About Us section, or it might assume that its readers know its perspective without explicitly stating it.
- When a site reflects a certain point of view, it might editorialize or cherry pick.
 - **Editorializing:** when authors insert their opinion into news reports.
 - **Cherry picking:** when a website only covers stories that support its point of view, or when an author only includes facts in a story that reflect their opinion.

5. Avoids Deceptive Headlines

NewsGuard’ Standard: The site generally does not publish headlines that include false information, significantly sensationalize, or otherwise do not reflect what is actually in the story.

- A headline tells a reader what’s in the story before he or she decides to read it. Some websites use exaggerated headlines that distort the facts in a story to entice people into clicking and reading an article.
 - Deceptive headlines are dangerous because people may only skim headlines they encounter online, and not take the time to read the articles.
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NewsGuard’s Criteria: Transparency

6. Website Discloses Ownership and Financing

NewsGuard’s Standard: The site discloses its ownership and/or financing, as well as any notable ideological or political positions held by those with a significant financial interest in the site, in a user-friendly manner.

- Sites may be operated by several different types of owners:
 - Individuals who run their own news website or opinion blog.
 - Companies, which can range from large media conglomerates like NBCUniversal and Sinclair, to small, family-owned businesses. Companies may be privately-owned or publicly-owned.
 - Nonprofit groups that often publish news stories related to their efforts and causes, such as Heritage.org and ACLU.org.
 - Governments that own and fund news sites, such as [RT.com](https://www.rt.com/) (the website of a Russian government propaganda effort), and the [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation](https://www.cbc.ca/) (which has safeguards to maintain independence).
- Sites may be financed by advertisements, subscriptions, merchandise sales, sponsored content, parent company revenue, or donations. Some websites exist mainly to make money through “clickbait” content and advertising, like providr.com.

7. Clearly Labels Advertising

NewsGuard's Standard: The site makes clear which content is paid for and which is not.

- Some advertisements are designed to resemble stories and trick a user into clicking.
 - Sponsored content includes stories that resemble news articles but are paid for by a company to promote its products or services. These should be labeled, but sometimes it can be hard to tell.
 - Affiliate marketing involves a website promoting goods or services sold elsewhere, enabling the website to get a cut of the eventual sale.
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8. Reveals Who's in Charge, Including Any Possible Conflicts of Interest

NewsGuard's Standard: Information about those in charge of the content is made accessible on the site, including any possible conflicts of interest.

- Owners, editors and publishers should be named, providing biographical and contact information, so that they can be held accountable for their site.
 - Readers should be able to understand why someone might have created a site, and what might be their motivation.
 - Those in charge should be easy to contact so they can receive feedback.
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9. Provides Information About Content Creators

NewsGuard's Standard: Information about those producing the content is made accessible on the site.

- Stories should state an author's real name. Some writers might use pseudonyms, or fake names, out of concern for their safety, such as if they might receive threats for expressing controversial opinions. On the other hand, it is easier for someone to make false or inflammatory claims when his or her real identity is not tied to what he or she has written.
- Content creators should provide contact information so readers can ask questions and make complaints, and bios revealing their backgrounds and any conflicts of interest with what they report.

Exercises

After introducing students to the NewsGuard framework for evaluating online information, present them with these exercises to put their news literacy skills to the test.

Be Your Own NewsGuard: Evaluating Websites

Suggested time: 45 minutes

- (20 minutes) **Without using the NewsGuard browser extension:** Have students evaluate selected NewsGuard-rated websites. Students should answer the following question: Is this site credible and transparent?
 - (10 minutes) Students read and research sites on their own.
 - (10 minutes) Students write their rationale.
 - (5 minutes) **Students discuss their ratings in small groups.**
 - (20 minutes) **As a class, refer to the NewsGuard ratings and reviews of each website.**
 - How did students' assessments compare to those of NewsGuard?
 - Were there any disagreements?
 - Anything students missed?
 - Anything NewsGuard missed?
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Be Your Own NewsGuard: Writing a Nutrition Label

Suggested time: 50 minutes

- (40 minutes) **Have students rate and write a Nutrition Label for a news source not rated by NewsGuard,** such as their school newspaper.
 - (10 minute) **Discuss as a class:** what made the source credible or transparent? What were the most difficult issues they encountered?
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Be Your Own NewsGuard: Not all Greens Are Equal

Suggested time: 15 minutes

- **Compare two green-rated websites from NewsGuard that receive different ratings on certain criteria**
 - For example, look at two popular lifestyle websites: People and Pop Sugar. People fails four criteria, while Pop Sugar fails only one.
 - **Discuss:** When might some of those failings be a problem?

False Content: Can You Spot the Fake?

Suggested time: 20 minutes

- (5 minutes) **Without using the NewsGuard browser extension:** Have students quickly evaluate two websites: heraldonline.com, a local newspaper in South Carolina, and thenyherald.com, a fake news website designed to appear to be a local news site.
- (5 minutes) **Discuss as a group:** Should you trust these websites? Why or why not?
- (5 minutes) **Read NewsGuard’s reviews.** Was there anything you missed?
- (5 minutes) **Discuss:** Have you ever fallen for a false story? Do you know anyone who has?

Gathering & Presenting Information: What’s the evidence?

Suggested time: 20 minutes

- (20 minutes) Strong reporting should cite facts to back its claims, and it’s important to consider how that evidence is being presented. Look at how the same research or information is reported by different sources, and how, changing the way information is presented can tell a completely different story.
 - **Example:** Read the Nutrition Label of healthy-holistic-living.com, which reported that magnesium is better and safer than other ADHD medication. It cited four studies about magnesium, three of which did not discuss ADHD. The one study that did discuss ADHD concluded “there is no evidence to support supplementation as a monotherapy for the treatment of ADHD,” and said nothing about magnesium being “better” or “safer.”
 - **Example:** Read the Nutrition Label of higherperspectives.com, which reported that short people are “angrier” than taller people, combining the findings of two research reports to back its claims, in the process misrepresenting both

Correcting Errors: Setting the Record Straight

Suggested time: 15 minutes

- (10 minutes) **Look at a few corrections news sites have issued.** Some errors are more benign (such as [this article](#) that misidentified the style of men’s shoe, or [this article](#) that misspelled the Movember Foundation). Other corrections are more consequential (such as the [2013 correction CBS issued](#) to its report about the attack in Benghazi or the [2003 correction](#) from the New York Times clarifying that its reporter fabricated information).
 - **Discuss:** Why were these corrections important?
- (5 minutes) Look at the nutrition labels for the National Enquirer and Daily Mail
 - **Discuss:** Why do those websites fail the “regularly corrects errors” criterion when they have issued corrections in the past?

Opinion and perspective

Suggested time: 20 minutes

- (10 minutes) **Look at how the same story is reported from sources with different views.**
 - Pick a site on the left (e.g. HuffPost, Alternet, or Mother Jones), a site in the middle (e.g. Reuters or the Associated Press), and a site on the right (e.g. The Daily Caller, The Daily Wire, or the Washington Times).
 - **Discuss:** What change from one story to another? Is information distorted? Are some facts cherry picked, and others left out?
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Headlines: Straightforward or Sensational?

Suggested time: 15 minutes

- (5 minutes) **Present a complicated or sensationalized headline from the day's news.**
 - (5 minutes) Encourage students to rewrite the headline as a 140-character Tweet, or in fewer (e.g. only five) words.
 - (5 minutes) **Students share their examples and discuss in small groups:** What gets distorted about a story when you omit or change certain words in a headline? Why would a site write a sensational headline?
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Ownership and Financing: Who's Behind Your News?

Suggested time: 30 minutes

- (15 minutes) **Without using NewsGuard:** Have students determine the owners of different websites and decide whether their identity might affect the quality of the site's reporting
 - RT.com, CBC.ca, and What-is-fracking.com
 - (5 minutes) **Students discuss their ratings in small groups.**
 - (15 minutes) **Refer to the NewsGuard ratings and reviews of each website.**
 - How did students' assessments compare to those of NewsGuard?
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Platforms

Suggested time: 20 minutes

- **Look at the Nutrition Labels for platforms, such as Wikipedia and YouTube.**
 - **Discuss:** Why are these sites considered platforms, and what makes that different from a green or a red site? When can it be useful to access information on these websites? When can relying on them be problematic?

Outcomes:

This guide aligns with [the Common Core](#) anchor standards for language arts and social studies and the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE) standards for technology engagement:

Reading

- “Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4
- “Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6
- “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8
- “Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

Research

- “Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
- “Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.” — ISTE 3a
- “Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.” — ISTE 3b
- “Students curate information from digital resources using a variety of tools and methods to create collections of artifacts that demonstrate meaningful connections or conclusions.” — ISTE 3c
- “Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.” — ISTE 3d

Writing

- “Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8

Language

- “Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3

Technology

- “Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6
- “Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.” — ISTE 6a