



# Whom Do You Believe?

Nick Seaver, Project NML

## Facilitator's Guide

### **Lesson Overview** (Grades 9-12)

Credibility assessment depends upon the ability of the assessor to consider a given piece of information in a certain context. In the offline world, context is typically straightforward: A reader seeking to assess the credibility of information found in a book may examine sources cited in the book; a patient seeking to assess the credibility of a doctor's report may consider the reputation of the medical school where the doctor was trained.

Online, the connections between different information sources are often less readily available than footnotes in a research work, and credentials like a medical degree are unverifiable or from unrecognized sources. In order to evaluate information in this environment, one must be able to situate it appropriately.

Information is always situated in a network of **credibility markers**. If someone on a message board posts a medical assertion ("Drinking only grapefruit juice is a healthy and safe way to lose weight"), that statement is enmeshed in a variety of contexts:

- **The credibility of the poster:**
  - Who is the poster? For how long have they been posting? What are their motivations for posting this?
- **The credibility of the board:**
  - Who usually posts on this board? How are other community members responding to this post? To posts in the past? Are they established "experts," who bring verifiable professional training and proven knowledge to the board? Or are they "enthusiasts," who bring primarily personal experience and motivation?
- **The Internet at large:**
  - What do other sources online have to say about this assertion? Is it on Wikipedia? What kind of argument is on the relevant Wikipedia talk page (if any)?



- What about the credibility of these other sources?

An effective credibility assessment maps out a portion of this space, locating a piece of information in the complex network of credibility markers available online.

### **Contextualization relies primarily on two new media literacy skills:**

- **Networking**—the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information.
- **Negotiation**—the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

The effective use of these two skills aids **judgment**—the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.

By exploring the ways in which digital technology has disrupted the linear (hierarchical) process by which knowledge has traditionally been produced and consumed, this lesson allows students to consider the credibility of individuals and information as a community concern, and to practice the **ethical thinking skill of reflecting on community-level benefits and harms** associated with different courses of action.

## **Ethical Thinking Skills**

### **Ethical thinking skills highlighted in this unit:**

- Consideration of the **potential benefits and harms to communities** of posting information or misinformation online.

## **New Media Literacies**

### **New media literacies highlighted in this unit:**

- **Networking**—the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information.
- **Judgment**—the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.



## Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to:

- Make judgments about the credibility of people with varying credentials.
- Describe and give examples of credibility markers.
- Evaluate the credibility of a given credibility marker by looking at the context around the marker.
- Identify different credibility markers that pertain to how people perceive your expertise in a community.

## Materials Used

- **For Students:**
  - “Overview” Handout
  - “Mapping Credibility” Handout
  - “Networks of Networks” Handout
  - Transcripts of Videos
  - Internet access
- **For Teacher/Facilitator:**
  - Video links (require Internet access):
    - Video 1: Matt Lauer interviews Jack Thompson and Tony Romando  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ey--3YV6FCw>
    - Video 2: Video Game Violence: A Gamer’s Point of View  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbQukhbx3Bg>
    - Video 3: Katie Couric’s Notebook  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDi5X6sN\\_JA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDi5X6sN_JA)
    - Youth Documentary <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVI-inERzKk>  
(contains some adult language)
  - “Transcripts of Videos” Handout can be used if Internet access is not available.

**NOTE:** The videos address video game violence, which can be a controversial topic. This topic was chosen for its likeliness to engage students on an issue they are concerned about, but the general scaffolding can be adapted to other topics if so desired. The optional Video 4 contains adult language, which has been excised from the transcript.



### Activity #1: From the Gut

**Introduction:** Distribute **Handout #1** to students. Explain that this lesson is about the challenges of establishing and assessing the credibility of people and information in the online environment.

- 1. **Watch video or use transcript of Video #1:** Matt Lauer Interviews Jack Thompson and Tony Romando. In this clip from “The Today Show,” Matt Lauer interviews two “experts” on video-game violence. Think about Tony Romando and Jack Thompson as sources of information. Have students consider:



- Who do you find more credible?
- What information do you have from the “Today” segment that affects how you judge their credibility?

- 2. **On the board, create a table with Tony and Jack’s names at the top.** Distribute **Handout #2**, and discuss the kinds of information that might influence our initial sense of these experts’ credibility, such as their appearance, jobs, training, political affiliations, languages, or accents. Have a class discussion to fill in the table with the factors that influenced viewers’ perceptions of the credibility of the two “experts.”

- 3. **Additional information on Tony and Jack’s credentials: The Editor and the Lawyer**  
Explain that according to Lauer’s introduction, Tony Romando is the editor of the gadget magazine *Sync*, and Jack Thompson is a lawyer and “video-game expert.” Television shows like “Today” often rely on credentials when they decide whom to invite to be guests on the show. For this segment, they chose two credentialed people with opposing viewpoints to set up an argument. Have students look at the credibility markers on the table and discuss whether credentials did in fact influence their perceptions of either expert’s credibility.

### Activity #2: Mapping Credentials

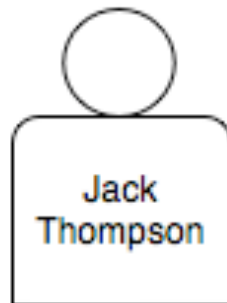
- 1. **Lead a structured discussion of credibility markers.**

Explain that all of the elements you identified in the table above are **credibility markers**, bits of evidence that you add up in order to decide whether someone is believable. These bits of evidence do not exist in a vacuum: they are all set in a specific **context**. The context of any piece of evidence helps you decide whether that evidence is credible, just as the evidence helps you decide whether a person is credible.



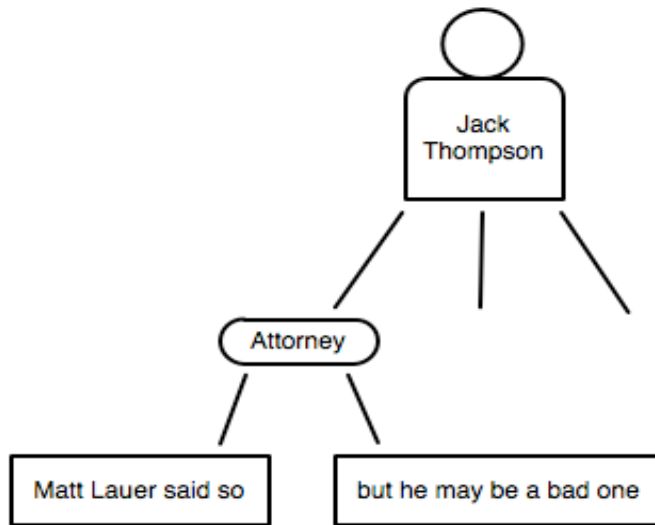
2. Explain that **Mapping** is a tool that you can use to visually organize all of these credibility markers so you can make an informed decision. Refer students back to **Handout #2** and explain that you are going to map out Jack Thompson's credibility.

Draw a shape on the board representing Jack Thompson and label it as such.





Explain that since we know he is an attorney, a fact that affects his credibility, we draw a line and attach “Attorney” to him:

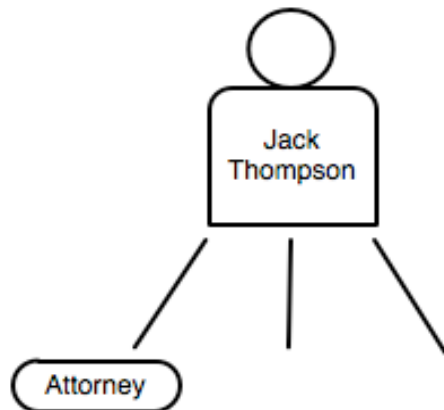


Work with students to complete the map, connecting other pieces of evidence from the table filled out earlier to the empty lines.

Explain that while the fact that Jack Thompson is an attorney is a piece of evidence that could influence your assessment of his credibility, it remains unclear just how credible that piece of evidence is. In light of this, pose the question: How much influence should that piece of evidence have on your opinion of Jack Thompson?

Well, Matt Lauer and “The Today Show” say he’s an attorney, and they don’t have much reason to lie about something like that. But we don’t know how good an attorney he is, just that he is one.

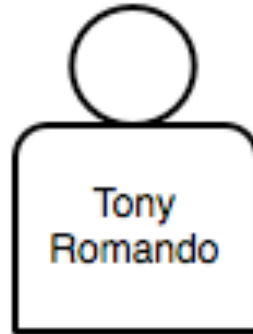
Think about your other pieces of evidence; how do you know they’re credible? Try attaching them to the network below, and connect their evidence





### 3. More Maps: Tony's Turn

Now that you've worked through Jack Thompson with your class as a group, have your students independently draw out a network for Tony Romando. Encourage them to make as many branches as they can, thinking about his credentials and anything else that comes to mind.



### 4. Relevance: The Law Degree and the Big Hair

Once students have completed their maps of Tony Romando, have them look at their diagrams, and think about whether the evidence on the map is **relevant**. For example,

- Does Tony Romando's hair actually make him less credible about video game violence?

While that one may be obvious, have students think about Jack Thompson's credentials:

- Does being an attorney make him more credible about video game violence? Why or why not?

Explain that deciding what evidence is relevant is a vital part of deciding how credible someone is. Have students go back to their diagrams and cross out evidence that they don't think is relevant to deciding how credible the experts are.

### 5. Is That All You Know?

Explain to students that so far, they've only been able to use evidence directly from this one video. Note that if you are using the Internet to watch the video, you have access to even more evidence: the entire World Wide Web!

Invite students to look up Tony Romando or the studies he cites online. Note that his magazine, *Sync*, is now out of business, and ask whether that affects their assessments of his credibility.



Have students locate Jack Thompson's Wikipedia page. Note that he has been disbarred in Florida, so he is no longer allowed to practice law. Ask whether that affects their assessments of his credibility as an expert on video game violence.

In searching out evidence, you can continue to grow your network of credibility markers, examining each piece of evidence for its **relevance** and **context**.

## 6. Discuss: Talking Heads

Point out that in this activity, we were specifically trying to assess the credibility of a **person**.

### Some questions for discussion:

- Once you've decided that someone is credible, would you believe anything they said? What other factors might be important to consider?
- Are credentials useful anymore, now that you can easily look up information on your own, without having to rely on what one person says?
- Do you think that the amount of information you need to know about a person changes depending on what kind of information you're getting from him/her? Why? What kinds of situations would change this?

## Activity #3: Machinima: What did Master Chief just say?

1. **Watch video or use transcript of Video #2:** "Video Game Violence: A Gamer's Point of View." Explain that this video is machinima, an animation made by controlling video-game characters as if they were actors and giving them lines.

Machinima can be a very expressive genre: In this video, the director is able to make a point about video game violence using the actual characters from a violent game.



2. **But that's *not* Master Chief, right?**

Point out that one big difference between the online and offline worlds is that online, it is easier to stay **anonymous**, which has implications for the ability to assess credibility.



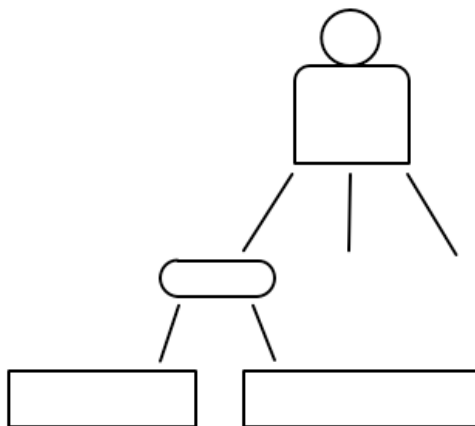
Explain that unlike the segment with the experts on “The Today Show,” we don’t know anything about the creator of this video. We never see the speaker, and he doesn’t claim to have any credentials. The only information we have about him is that according to the video’s YouTube page, the producer’s username is DemonElite117. But this information has limited value, because we can’t find DemonElite117 on Wikipedia, and he’s not a public figure like the experts on “The Today Show.” However, that doesn’t mean we have to completely disregard what he says in his video. In this case, instead of assessing the credibility of a **person**, we can assess the credibility of a given piece of **information**.

### 3. Here comes everybody!

Write the words “expert” and “enthusiast” on the board. Have students write down definitions of each word, and then look up their dictionary definitions. In pairs or small groups, have students discuss the differences between their own definitions and the dictionary definitions, and then compare and contrast the meanings of the two terms as they now understand them. What are the characteristics of an expert? Of an enthusiast? Is information presented by an expert always more credible? Think of a situation in which you would definitely want an expert opinion, and one in which an enthusiast’s opinion would be acceptable, or preferable.

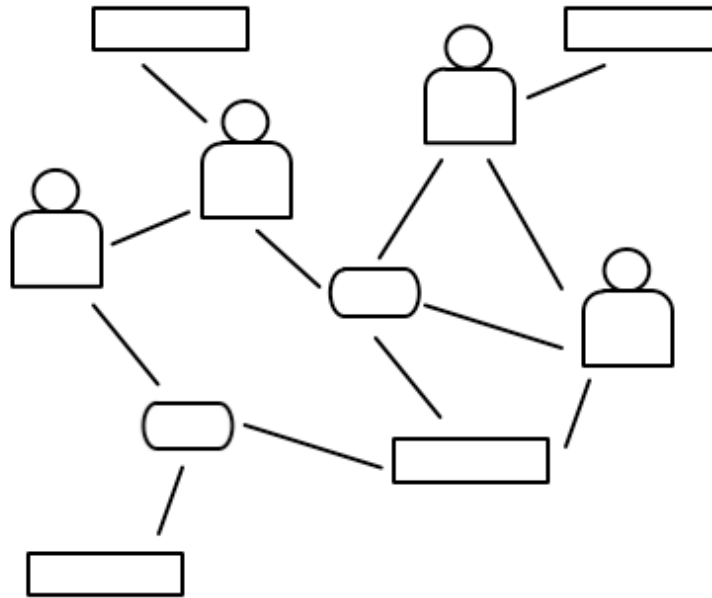
Explain that the Internet provides a way to add to a small number of experts with a large number of enthusiasts. The credibility of any one enthusiast is not as important (although it still matters a little), because we can check what they say with a large number of other people.

Have students revisit their diagrams from the first activity, explaining that now, instead of having a **top-down** network with one expert at the top, like this





our network will be more connected, focusing on a variety of interrelated sources and pieces of information, like this (draw or project an image representing distributed knowledge):



Explain that it is more difficult to assess the credibility of any one information source online, so we need more context. Furthermore, that context is also going to be harder to verify, so we'll need more context there too! Explain that mapping in this situation is about following leads and looking up information, but that you don't need to know *everything* to assess credibility—you just need to decide how much context is appropriate.

### Activity #4: Networks of Networks

1. Explain that because we don't have credentials or Matt Lauer to vouch for the information in DemonElite117's video, it is more important to **contextualize** it.

Point out that the narrator says that some studies connect violent games to violent behavior, "but this is very rare." Ask students how they might evaluate this statement. If necessary, suggest that they can start by looking at its immediate context: the YouTube video.

#### Ask students the following questions:

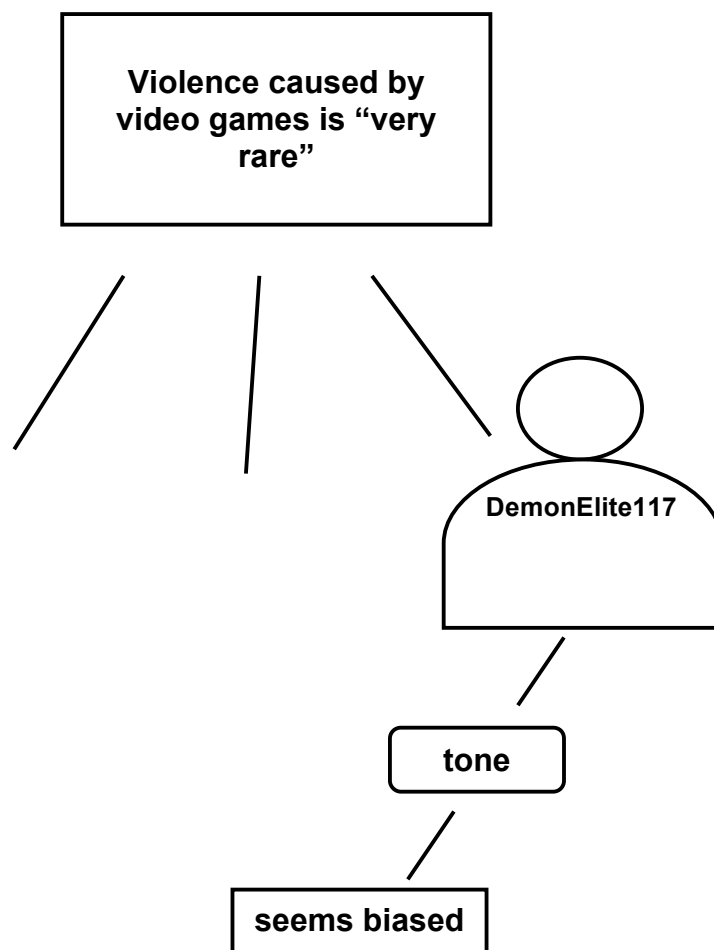
- What is there in the video that affects how credible you find this information?



- Think specifically about the **tone** of the video and the **motivation** behind its making.

Explain that when thinking about tone and motivation, we're trying to imagine what the author of the video is like, so that we can assess his or her credibility as a person. In this case, however, because the person is anonymous, it is difficult to form a clear picture of what the person is like, so we just look at the claims they make. The video doesn't provide very much evidence that suggests it is credible, so we need to expand our network.

Draw or project a diagram representing a credibility map for DemonElite117. Here is what our network might look like so far:

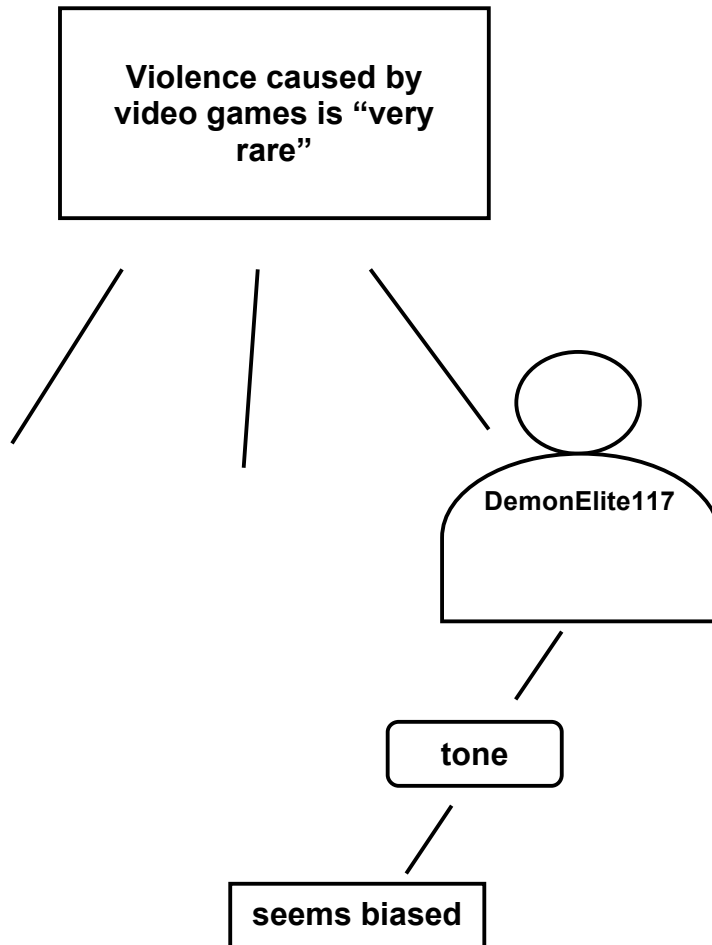


Point out that so far, the information doesn't seem especially credible. With only our guesses about the anonymous author as evidence, it looks like we need to find more evidence to support the claim that "violence caused by video games 'is very rare'" if we're going to believe it.



Explain that online, you have access to an extraordinary number of interlinked networks, and these can be useful tools for contextualization.

- 2. **Distribute Handout #3 and have your students search** for “video game violence” online. Suggest they try **Wikipedia** or a news aggregator like **Google News** to see what evidence there is out there regarding video game violence. Instruct them to connect their new evidence to the network below:



Point out that by researching online, you are forming the connections that make up a new **credibility network**.

This extended network allows you to take a statement from a video with very little context and situate it in a much larger context. The more connections you have in your network, the better you will be able to tell if any given piece of information is credible.



### 3. Where does it end!?

Ask whether any of the students searched Wikipedia for the last activity, and if so, whether they found the page on “Video Game Controversy.” Note that this page contains a lot of information, and if they looked at the **talk page**, where the Wikipedia editors discuss the main article, they would find even more information.

*(The talk page can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Video\\_game\\_controversy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Video_game_controversy))*

Point out that if they continued mapping every new piece of information they found, their map would never end! There are dozens of sources cited on the Wikipedia talk page and hundreds of news articles about video game violence.

Explain that while this may seem overwhelming, the trick with mapping is that you don’t need to map everything, but the more you map, the more likely it is that you understand a claim in context. Deciding how thorough a credibility network needs to be is not arbitrary, but requires an understanding of the potential reach and impact of the credibility assessment at hand.

### 4. How much? What are the stakes?

Remind students that in the present situation, they’re just working on a class project. The information about video game violence is not going to be used for any specific purpose, and their credibility maps won’t be shared beyond the classroom (unless you find something you think would be a good addition to the Wikipedia page!).

This means that right now, the **stakes** are low. No one is relying on their credibility assessments to make important decisions. Ask the students: What if we were in Congress and were expected to vote on whether to censor violent video games?

In that case, the stakes would be very high, so it would be more important to map out more of the credibility network. If, as a member of Congress, you failed to map out enough, you might make an **unethical** decision that could negatively affect the lives of other people. In the case of members of Congress, their constituents have elected them thinking that they will make this kind of assessment in an informed and ethical way.

### 5. Looking for consistency

Explain that while drawing out their maps, students should be looking for **consistency**. If the various pieces of evidence they gather seem to agree with one another, then it’s more likely that



the information in question is credible. If they find inconsistencies, they should dig deeper to understand the causes.

## 6. Discuss

Point out that finding sources that all agree with each other is still not a guarantee that the information you find will be right. What problems do you think could come up when using this approach? How could you try to overcome them?

## Activity #5: Presenting Credibility

1. **Watch video or use transcript of Video #3: Katie Couric's Notebook.** Explain that in this video, Katie Couric delivers her "Notebook" segment, in which she gives her own opinion on video game violence. Point out that while she does not claim to be an expert, she still presents her views as credible.

Given what they've learned about assessing credibility, encourage students to think about the other half of credibility as they watch the video: How do you present **your own** credibility? More importantly, how do you present your own credibility accurately and fairly?



2. **I'm not an expert, I just talk a lot.** Remind students that Katie Couric is not a video game expert, and she doesn't even claim to be one in this video. So what makes her a credible source for information about the controversy?

As they watch the video, have students write a list of the things they think Katie Couric does to make herself seem credible.

3. **It's the network.** Have students share their lists with the group. If necessary, point out that just by virtue of being on television, Katie Couric gains the appearance of some credibility; someone picked her to be the anchor, and we assume he/she had a good reason. Remind



students that because she has a history on television and a life in public, we can look at her record and evaluate it for **consistency** (does she change what she says a lot?) and **correctness** (has she been right about things like this in the past?).

Explain that Katie Couric does not just rely on her own personal credibility to give her statement. (Her personal credibility may not even be relevant on our map!) Instead, she **situates** herself in a credibility network. Ask if anyone knows how she achieves this: She quotes a source (in this case, Jim Steyer of Common Sense Media) who **is** an expert, and she uses his statements as a way to back up her own. In this way, Katie Couric strengthens the credibility of what she says by mapping out some of the credibility network for us!

4. **You can do it, too!** When you have some special knowledge (maybe after completing a credibility mapping like you did in the last activity), you can share it with others. When you do, it is important to present your own credibility **accurately** and **fairly**. After all, other people may use your information to form their own credibility mappings!

Think of a topic you know a lot about—it could be a favorite sport, a television show, or maybe a music group. How would you prove to someone, in writing, that you know a lot about it? How would you acknowledge the limits of what you know?

### Activity #6: Apply It (Optional)

1. **Watch video or use transcript of Video #4: Youth Documentary.** This video is a youth-produced short about video game violence that brings up many of the issues discussed in the earlier activities.
2. Try some of the mapping techniques on the speakers in the video, or discuss your thoughts about these questions in a group:



- What kinds of people are interviewed in the video? Would you consider them **experts** or **enthusiasts**?
- Does being a gamer make you an expert on video games?
- What about the teacher? Is he more credible because he's an authority figure?



- What kinds of information sources do you think are the most credible when it comes to the effects of video game violence on youth? Why?

## Concluding Takeaways

By exploring the ways in which digital technology has changed the terms of knowledge production and consumption, this lesson encourages students to unpack the notion of credibility as a status that is granted or assumed through a top-down, hierarchical process, and instead engage with it as a distributed process of investigation. Through mapping, students have the opportunity to think critically about what kinds of information they need to gather in order to make sound judgments about credibility of people and the claims they make, and to distinguish between different levels of expertise.

## Assessment

**Through participation in class activities and discussions and/or answers to optional assessment questions, students should demonstrate they can:**

- Make judgments about the credibility of people with varying credentials.
- Describe and give examples of credibility markers.
- Evaluate the credibility of a given credibility marker by looking at the context around the marker.
- Identify different credibility markers that pertain to how people perceive expertise in a community.

### Assessment Questions (Optional)

- What is a credibility marker? List 2-3 situations in which you might look for credibility markers to make a judgment.
- You've just read a blog post about health that says that "given the pace of medical science today, in just 10 years we will be able to cure all forms of cancer." What are some credibility markers you might look for to evaluate this statement?
- What makes someone an expert? What makes someone an enthusiast? When might you want to trust an expert, and when an enthusiast?
- Can you identify different credibility markers that pertain to how people perceive your expertise in a community?



# Video #1 Transcript:

## Matt Lauer interviews Jack Thompson and Tony Romando



*These are not verbatim transcripts of the videos, but rather paraphrases that try to capture their main features.*

Matt Lauer: Tony Romando is editor in chief of the gadget magazine *Sync* and Jack Thompson is an attorney and video game expert. Guys, good morning to both of you.

Tony, let me start with you. What is the appeal? Why do you think this series of games [Grand Theft Auto] has struck a chord?

Tony Romando: I think the big deal with it is, as we know, this is not for kids. This is for a mature audience. This is for adults. Thirty-year-old men, you know. The average gamer is 29 years old, so the guy who works 12 hours a day on Wall Street and is stressed out, and gets home, you know, this is his vice. This is his way to relieve a little stress.



Matt: Why do we need beating up people, shooting people, getting points for killing cops, hanging out with hookers and pimps, as an outlet?

Tony: It's just like a Hollywood blockbuster. People go for the entertainment value. This is basically putting you in a big-time Hollywood production where you're the star. In defense of the company that makes it, the whole game is not just about beating up cops and women, you know. When you turn on the people that are there to protect you, the whole game turns on you. There are consequences for that violence.

Matt: All right, it's for adults, a parental issue, but the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] has a study that says that first of all 12-, 13-, 14-year-old kids, even if it says "M" on the box, are going into stores, buying it, and what they also say is that about 80% of the time, they're accompanied by their parents when they're buying the game. How does that strike you, Jack?

Jack Thompson: My son was able to go into Best Buy here in South Miami last night and buy it at the age of 12, no questions asked. What Tony doesn't apparently know is that Harvard and Indiana Universities have determined that these games, they're actually processed in an adolescent and in a teen in the part of the brain in which copycatting is likely to occur, whereas adults process them in the forebrain, where differentiation between reality and fantasy occur. These games are murder simulators.

Tony: That's absurd. You know there's no medical backing, no findings, no research that prove that—

Jack: Of course there is.

Tony: —no studies whatsoever that say—



Jack: You don't know that.

Tony: —that games are bad for children or change you whatsoever. Think about it: What came first, the gangs or the game? The games picked it up.

You can go on with all the legal battles you want to. You've been involved in every legal battle ever with video games and have never actually won a single case.

Matt: You said yourself that this is not for children, Tony. But would you concede that children probably process this in a slightly different manner than adults?

Tony: I would think to a certain degree. I mean, there are far bloodier games than this. This is a parent's decision to make. You need to know where your child is at. You need to know if your child is going to Best Buy. You need to know what your children play. If you don't know your children's top five video games, it's your ... you know ...

Jack: First of all, the heads of six major health care organizations, including the American Medical Association, have all testified under oath, before Congress, that there is a direct cause-and-effect link between these games and teen violence. Secondly, law enforcement has found repeatedly, as in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that some young people played Grand Theft Auto 3, hopped in their truck, and ran over a man they didn't even know, went home, and started playing the game. They decided the game was simply—that murder was an extension of the game.

Tony: It's the same old song and dance. You know, rock 'n roll, and everything you want to peg from throughout the years. It's the parent's job. I mean, there's no doubt, this game is rough and it's tough and it's not meant for 13-year-old kids. You don't know the video games they play, you're not doing your job.

Jack: Tell that to the families of the dead people.



# Video #2 Transcript:

## Video Game Violence, From a Gamer's Point of View



*This video is youth-produced, largely humorous, and contains examples of (mild) video-game violence amid the dialogue.*

[Halo players stand around, motionless in the Halo environment.]

Master Chief: Is the camera on? Is it recording? Okay.

Hey folks! You may be wondering why we aren't killing each other like we should be. Well, lately some people have been trying to convince the world that video games make gamers violent. People like Jack Thompson, and maybe even your mom.

So we're here to tell you that this is [BLEEP]. We are the gamers of Halo 2.

[Video game car crashes]

We are the gamers of Grand Theft Auto.

[Explosions]



We are the gamers of DDR.

[Dance Dance Revolution gameplay]

[Cut back to Halo, in a train station.]

See that Spartan over there? He plays M-rated games, but you don't see him running around, blasting everybody with a rifle.

Spartan 1: Hey dude, I need to be somewhere. I don't want to just stand here.

Master Chief: Don't worry about it, man, we're almost done.

So let's see what would happen if the stereotype of gamers being violent were true.

[Player shoots the other players in the train station.]

You don't see that every day, do you? In fact, you never see this.

Our research of the topic has had very mixed results, but they do say that extreme exposure to extreme violence has increased accounts of violence, but this is very rare. Other things, like a bad neighborhood, can make gamers violent.

[example of a "bad neighborhood" acted out in Halo]

Master Chief: Games like Grand Theft Auto and Burnout have a lot of road rage, but does this make gamers, once they finally get their hands on real wheels, be crazy drivers?

[Example of dangerous driving in Burnout]

Thankfully, gamers don't drive like this.

Spartan 1: Actually, we drive like this:

[Halo players act out a fast-food drive-through order.]



Master Chief: Maybe losing is what makes gamers so violent? Nope, that's not it either. We don't do this:

[Player starts shooting wildly and is bleeped out.]

When we lose, we're like this guy:

Spartan 2: What!? I lost! Whatever, man, I'm getting some more cheesy puffs.

Master Chief: So, you see, people, not all these rumors about M-rated games and gamers are true. So, tell Jack Thompson, and maybe even your mom, that none of this is true.



# Video #3 Transcript:

## Katie Couric's Notebook



Katie Couric: It's banned in Britain where the film board condemned its casual sadism and unrelenting focus on stalking and brutal slaying. But here in this country, Manhunt Two goes on sale tomorrow. What sets this video game apart is that the player can become physically involved in the acts of violence. Rather than just pushing buttons, the player actually wields a knife, an axe, a glass shard to stab an opponent.

The game has been rated "M," meaning you have to be 17 to purchase one, but retailers have been known to sell to underage kids, and some of the game is already online. We talked with Jim Steyer of Common Sense Media, who said that research shows violent games can cause kids to act more aggressively and accept violence as a part of everyday life.

So if you have a child who's a gamer, discourage this form of "entertainment." Too much time playing video games is hazardous to their health, and with this latest entry, may be hazardous to the health of others, too.

That's a page from my notebook. I'm Katie Couric, CBS News.



# Video #4 Transcript:

## Video Game Violence, A Youth Documentary



*(This video contains adult language that is excised from the transcript, but some violent references have been left in.)*

Narrator: Video games have come a long way since the 1970s. And with it comes ratings, controversy, and other issues in our modern day and age.

First, let's see what the gaming community plays nowadays.

Gamer 1: World of Warcraft.

Gamer 2: Knights of the Old Republic.

Gamer 3: I just finished God of War, the first one last night.



Gamer 4: Fable.

Gamer 5: Old Mario games.

Gamer 6: Just about all of the newer ones. Ha-ahem.

Gamer 7: Uhhhhh.

Gamer 8: BloodBath 3, I play Stab a Hooker.

Gamer 9: Kill Zone.

Gamer 10: Mortal Kombat.

Gamer 8: Crack Baby Massacre. LAPD Beats Black People.

Gamer 11: Devil May Cry series.

Gamer 12: Halo 3.

Gamer 13: Guitar Hero.

Narrator: Obviously most of the games people play nowadays seem violent, but what do those people think about video-game violence?

Gamer 6: Violent video games are, umm ...



Gamer 7: They're fine.

Gamer 8: If you know your kid's psychotic, don't let him play a video game where he acts psychotic!

Gamer 14: A lot of video games are good, if you are not, like, a serial killer...but they can make you be a serial killer.

Gamer 15: It's good.

Gamer 9: It's good.

Gamer 16: It's good.

Gamer 15: You can shoot anyone ...

Gamer 16: Yeah, you can shoot anybody ...

Gamer 15: ... but inside the game. Don't come to school and do that....

Gamer 10: I don't think they cause violence or anything; it's just they're fun to play, and I like them.

Gamer 5: They can also be quite hilarious when you're playing. But only because it's a video game....



- Teacher:** Hi, I'm Stuart Morse, and I'm a computer-applications teacher as well as Honors US History teacher. The issue of violent video games is really a non-issue. People of the high-school age and even a little bit younger should clearly be able to determine the difference between fantasy and reality. And if they are unable to make that determination, the problem is far deeper than simple video games. Then you're looking at issues of parenting. Why someone hasn't explained to the individual the difference between fantasy and reality? And if you're going to blame video games for it, you know, I think that's just passing the buck. It's definitely a parenting issue.
- Narrator:** It seems that most people are pro-violence. But it's not like the majority act out that violence in real life. Most people, in fact, have found healthier alternatives to relieve stress.
- Gamer 11:** I don't cuss people out, I just make weird noises like “Huhn!” or “Arrrh!” or “Git them!” Y'know, stuff like that.
- Narrator:** Of course, when someone supports something, there's always someone who opposes against it.
- Anchor:** He is a Christian Conservative lawyer who is on a crusade against video games he says are evil.
- Narrator:** Meet Jack Thompson. A self-proclaimed crusader against video games, he's been in more lawsuits with game manufacturers than any other attorney.
- Tony Romando:** He's been in every legal battle ever with video games, every music, Howard Stern—you know, everything, but he's never won a single dollar. He's never actually won a single case.



Narrator: And most of those lawsuits were involved with Take-Two Interactive, the creators and publishers of the Grand Theft Auto series, Bully, and several other controversial titles. However, most of these cases were closed due to insufficient evidence. Take-Two eventually filed a lawsuit against Thompson who was trying to prevent the sale of their upcoming titles Grand Theft Auto VI and Manhunt 2, stating that the lawsuits were a violation of their First Amendment rights.

Thompson replied to this by saying "I have been praying, literally, that Take-Two and its lawyers would do something so stupid, so arrogant, so dumb, that such a misstep would enable me to destroy Take-Two".

His involvement with gaming in the media, and especially the use of legal threats, have raised questions about First Amendment rights, and [the] Florida Bar Association is currently seeking sanctions against Thompson for inappropriate conduct. All of these issues and more just show that video game violence is a complex topic that will be discussed for years to come.



# Whom Do You Believe?

## Handout #1

### Lesson Introduction: The Importance of Context

Things to consider when establishing context for the credibility of information found on the Internet:

Online, the connections between different information sources are often less readily available than footnotes in a research work, and credentials like medical degrees are unverifiable or from unrecognized sources. In order to evaluate information in this environment, one must be able to situate it appropriately.

Information is always situated in a network of **credibility markers**. If someone on a message board posts a medical assertion (“Drinking only grapefruit juice is a healthy and safe way to lose weight”), that statement is enmeshed in a variety of contexts:

#### The credibility of the poster:

- Who is the poster? For how long have they been posting? What are their motivations for posting this?

#### The credibility of the board:

- Who usually posts on this board? How are other community members responding to this post? To posts in the past? Are they established “experts,” who bring verifiable professional training and proven knowledge to the board? Or are they “enthusiasts,” who bring primarily personal experience and motivation?

#### The Internet at large:

- What do other sources online have to say about this assertion? Is it on Wikipedia? What kind of argument is on the relevant Wikipedia talk page (if any)?
- What about the credibility of these other sources?



# Whom Do You Believe?

## Handout #2

### Activity #2: Mapping Credentials

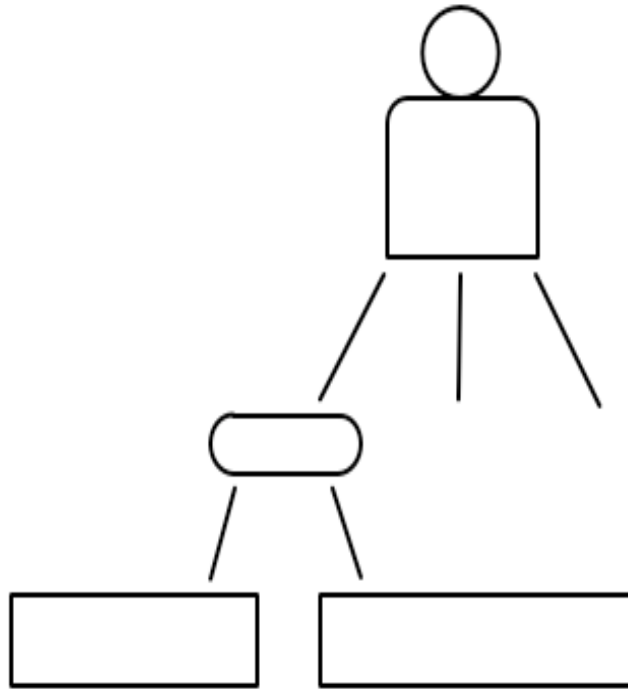
#### Instructions:

1. Fill out Credibility Table: Use the table below to list evidence of credibility for Jack Thompson and Tony Romando.
2. On the next page, complete the diagram to map out Jack Thompson's credibility using the evidence generated through class discussion.

Jack Thompson	Tony Romando



**Mapping** is a tool that you can use to visually organize all of these credibility markers so you can make an informed decision. Complete the diagram using the information from the table.





# Whom Do You Believe?

## Handout #3

### **Activity #4: Networks of Networks**

The narrator in DemonElite117's video says that some studies connect violent games to violent behavior, "but this is very rare." How can we evaluate this claim, given that the creator of the video is anonymous?

What is there in the video that affects how credible you find this information? Think specifically about the tone of the video and the motivation behind its making.

Now search for "video game violence" using tools you may already use online. If you can't think of a source you would go to, you might try Wikipedia or a news aggregator like Google News to see what evidence there is out there regarding video-game violence. Connect your new evidence to the network on the following page.

