



Making Credibility Judgments Online

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Facilitator's Guide

Lesson Overview (Grades 7-12)

In this lesson, students read a quotation from Eva, 16, and are asked to consider how she makes credibility decisions about her fellow game players. Eva plays RuneScape, a Massively Multiplayer Online Game. Participants play as characters in a persistent game environment. They cooperate with other players to achieve quests, such as killing game monsters.

In this anecdote, Eva describes how she was tricked into trusting a fellow player named Victor. Following this experience, she developed a new system for judging the credibility and trustworthiness of other players.

This lesson introduces some of the issues associated with making credibility decisions in online environments where people don't know one another offline. Two themes addressed in this lesson are: the differences between online and offline credibility assessment and the suitability of specific pieces of evidence for different kinds of assessment (e.g., skill level is a good piece of evidence for assessing competence in a game, but is a less effective piece of evidence for determining courteousness to others).

Ethical thinking skills highlighted in this lesson:

- **Reflection on Roles and Responsibilities**—Roles, such as student council president, entail specific responsibilities. For example, the student council president might be responsible for representing student interests to the faculty. To be an ethical participant in communities, it is necessary to take seriously our roles and implied responsibilities.

New media literacies highlighted in this lesson:

- **Judgment**—the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.



Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to:

- Describe the differences and similarities between offline and online assessments of trustworthiness.
- Enumerate different types of trustworthiness and give examples of evidence relevant to each type.

Materials Used

- “Making Credibility Judgments in Online Games” Handout

Lesson Introduction

Ask students if they have ever had to trust someone online. How did they decide to make the judgment to trust this person? Did they know him/her from offline? How do they decide to trust someone offline? Is it different? What kinds of things did they use as evidence that this person was trustworthy, both offline and online? What makes it harder to assess online information? Does the evidence change depending on what you trust a person for? (For example, Do you consider the same things when deciding whether someone would be a good partner for a group project versus whether or not he/she would pay you back for lending them a DVD?)

Determining if someone is trustworthy or credible is difficult both offline and online. Online, you have fewer appearance clues—you can't see someone—and you only have his/her actions and text (if you are IMing for example) to determine trustworthiness. In both online and offline cases, it is important to determine what you trust someone for—to be competent in the game, to be a good friend, etc.—to know what types of evidence you should consider.

Today's lesson addresses how one teen, Eva, assesses other people's trustworthiness in an online game. In this lesson, we'll compare the two different ways Eva assess credibility.

Lesson Instructions

1. **Introduce** the lesson.
2. **Break the class up** into small groups and **hand out** the Eva sheet.



3. For 15-20 minutes, have the **groups read through the Eva story and discuss** the questions.
4. Bring the class together and have the groups **collectively answer the questions**. **NOTE:** You could ask different groups to present answers to the different questions.
5. If necessary, **use the questions** provided on the quotation sheet and provided below.

Lesson Discussion Questions

NOTE: Begin with the questions on the “Rats” Worksheet (not reprinted here). The first 6 questions listed below are also posted in the annotated Facilitator Quotation Sheet.

1. What does Victor’s skill level really tell Eva about him? Does it indicate that he will be a helpful person?
2. Eva assumed that now that Victor was her friend, he was **accountable** to her. She assumed their friendship involved mutual responsibilities to each other. Should Eva have come to this conclusion based on the evidence from Victor?
3. If Eva was talking to Victor offline, what other things could she have used to tell if he was trustworthy? (For example, facial cues, eye contact)
4. In the second part of her story, Eva uses time in the game as a marker of credibility. Is time a good factor to consider? Why or why not? What would time be useful in figuring out?
5. Eva uses her cousin, an avid player of the game, to determine if others are credible. What do you think about Eva using her cousin as a way to judge others? How could it be effective?
6. Why do you think Eva talks with new players before asking them for help?
7. In Eva’s story, are there any similarities between determining someone’s trustworthiness online versus offline? Differences?
8. What do you think about Eva’s credibility judgments? Does she make good judgments?
9. How do you make credibility judgments when interacting with others online? What do you think about when you make judgments?

Concluding Takeaways

Eva describes how she assessed, or made a judgment about, Victor, using skill as a proxy both for Victor’s competence as a player and for his treatment of others. Following her experience with Victor, she evaluates players’ trustworthiness differently. She still uses skill level as a proxy for their competency in the game; however, to assess a player’s courteousness towards others, she asks them about their motivations in playing RuneScape, the time they have spent playing the game, and whether



or not they know a trusted player in the game. Eva's new model tries to identify the appropriate piece of evidence to look at for determining courteousness.

From today's lesson, we can see how important it is, whether online or offline, to collect the appropriate form of evidence. Eva is limited online—she couldn't see if Victor was laughing at her trust in him, for example. However, Eva is able to use the signals around her to make better assessments. She now distinguishes between markers of skill and markers of kindness in the game. When you make decisions about credibility online, think about what you are assessing the other person for and what pieces of evidence will best inform that assessment.

Assessment

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

- Describe the differences and similarities between offline and online assessments of trustworthiness.
- Enumerate different types of trustworthiness and give examples of evidence relevant to each type.

Assessment Questions (Optional)

- Why might it be harder to decide whether to trust someone online than it is to do so offline?
- Compare these two online situations where you're deciding whether or not to trust someone: a) someone has asked to be your friend on Facebook, b) someone gave you advice about nutrition on a forum. What evidence would you use for one situation that wouldn't be good for the other?



Making Credibility Judgments Online Facilitator Quotation Sheet

Instructions

Read the following story about Eva. Eva, 16, plays the Massively Multiplayer Online Game, RuneScape. Below, Eva describes how she trusted a fellow player, Victor, to help her in the game. Eva was tricked into giving him 50 coins.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why did Eva trust Victor?
2. What pieces of evidence did she use to determine that Victor was trustworthy? Did the evidence Eva used help her to make a good decision? Why or why not?
3. How does Eva determine if players are credible or trustworthy now? Is Eva's new model for determining if players are credible or trustworthy a better model than before? Why or why not?
4. What about online communication makes it hard to assess people and information?

FACILITATOR NOTE: The annotations contain sample questions; these annotations are intended for use if the students struggle with the questions.



Eva's Story

INTERVIEWER: HAVE YOU HAD AN EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD TRUST SOMEONE AND THEY BACKSTABBED YOU?

Yeah. In RuneScape I used to talk to this random kid, Victor. I saw him with a really good armor and he had a really good sword.

I asked him: "How did you get to this skill level because I see you're a level 57 and I'm only in level 20?"

Victor told me: "The way you get up to this skill level is [to] just follow me so I can take you."

And then I had felt like I had him as a friend. I had already added him as one of my friends. So, then Victor took me to his dungeon and there were humongous rats in there. And you would have to fight them, but they can bite you. I was fighting, and I lost.

I asked him: "What happened? Where are you?"

Victor then told me: "I just wanted to see if you were going to die so that you could leave me alone."

So, Victor betrayed me. Even before we went to his dungeon, he told me that first I had to give him 50 coins so he could help me. So, I gave him 50 coins so that he could help me.

INTERVIEWER: AND HE CHEATED YOU.

Yeah. Then he took my money and left.

FloresAn 5/27/09 9:43 AM

Comment [1]: Eva uses Victor's armor and SKILL as a proxy for credibility.

Question:

What does Victor's skill level really tell Eva about him? Does it indicate that he will be a helpful person?

FloresAn 5/28/09 9:48 AM

Comment [2]: 1.Eva assumed that now that he was her friend, he was ACCOUNTABLE to her because she assumed their friendship involved responsibilities to each other.

Question:

Should Eva have come to this conclusion based on the evidence from Victor?



INTERVIEWER: I KNOW YOU GOT CHEATED, BUT IS THAT SOMETHING THAT TROUBLED YOU?

No, not really. Because after I felt that I got cheated, that's when I started noticing other ways to check out players.

First, let me start talking to that person before I ask them for help. So, first I'm going to start asking them: "Oh, how did you come to RuneScape? Oh, do you know my cousin? He's been on RuneScape for a long time."

And I'll start interacting with them and then I'll ask them, "Oh, how did you get to this quest in the game?" But I wouldn't tell him to take me to that quest now.

I'll just be, "Oh, okay." They'll just tell me where the quest is and I'll just have to look it up on the map and try to see how I get there.

FloresAn 5/27/09 9:43 AM

Comment [3]: Eva can only interact with Victor through TEXT in the game.

Question:

If Eva was talking to Victor offline, what other things could she have used to tell if he was trustworthy? (Facial cues, eye contact)

FloresAn 6/22/09 10:49 AM

Comment [4]: Eva now uses TIME in the game as a marker of credibility.

Question:

In the second part of her story, Eva uses time in the game as a marker of credibility. Is time a good factor to consider? Why or why not? What would time be useful in figuring out?

FloresAn 5/15/09 1:38 PM

Comment [5]: Eva uses her cousin, an avid player of the game, to determine if others are credible.

Question:

What do you think about Eva using her cousin as a way to judge others? How could it be effective?

FloresAn 5/27/09 9:43 AM

Comment [6]: Eva can probably get a sense of TONE from her initial discussion.

Question:

Why do you think Eva talks with new players before asking them for help?



Making Credibility Judgments Online Student Quotation Sheet

Instructions

Read the following story about Eva. Eva, 16, plays the Massively Multiplayer Online Game RuneScape. Below, Eva describes how she trusted a fellow player, Victor, to help her in the game. Eva was tricked into giving him 50 coins.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why did Eva trust Victor?
2. What pieces of evidence did she use to determine that Victor was trustworthy? Did the evidence Eva used help her to make a good decision? Why or why not?
3. How does Eva determine if players are credible or trustworthy now? Is Eva's new model for determining if players are credible or trustworthy a better model than before? Why or why not?
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Eva's Story

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Victor told me: "The way you get up to this skill level is [to] just follow me so I can take you."

And then I had felt like I had him as a friend. I had already added him as one of my friends. So, then Victor took me to his dungeon and there were humongous rats in there. And you would have to fight them, but they can bite you. I was fighting, and I lost.

I asked him: "What happened? Where are you?"

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So, Victor betrayed me. Even before we went to his dungeon, he told me that first I had to give him 50 coins so he could help me. So I gave him 50 coins so that he could help me.

INTERVIEWER: AND HE CHEATED YOU.

Yeah. Then he took my money and left.

INTERVIEWER: I KNOW YOU GOT CHEATED, BUT IS THAT SOMETHING THAT TROUBLED YOU?

No, not really. Because after I felt that I got cheated, that's when I started noticing other ways to check out players.

First, let me start talking to that person before I ask them for help. So, first I'm going to start asking them: "Oh, how did you come to RuneScape? Oh, do you know my cousin? He's been on RuneScape for a long time."

And I'll start interacting with them and then I'll ask them, "Oh, how did you get to this quest in the game?" But I wouldn't tell him to take me to that quest now.

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