

# Appendix II: Can You Believe It?

## *An Internet Problem Solving Activity*

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### **Purpose**

To develop critical thinking and problem solving skills in evaluating content from the Internet.

### **Materials**

Computer workstations with Internet access.

Activity sheets, paper and pencils for small groups.

### **Setting**

Computer Lab

### **Time**

30-60 minutes

### **Audience**

Middle and High School ages

Internet sites and commercial names used in this activity are for education purposes only and do not represent an endorsement of any products or services by the US Army, CFSC, US Department of Agriculture - CSREES, 4-H or any affiliated entities.

### **Background**

The Internet is a wonderful source of information about practically any topics. However, anyone with access to a web server can create a web page or distribute information on email. It is important to develop skills to help you sort through the web sites and email messages and separate truth from fiction and hype.

If your group is not familiar with the Internet or using search engines, you should present the "Using Search Engines" lesson before you do this activity.

### **Introduction**

Most of us surf the Internet and use email. Have you ever found a web page or received an email message that just didn't sound right?

Today we're going to become Internet Detectives. We're going to learn ways to tell if you can "believe it or not." Then we'll get in small groups and let you find the clues and decide if a web page or email is truth or fiction.

### **Investigating the Clues**

When you read a newspaper or magazine article, how do you evaluate its content? Is there bias? Is the author a specialist in the topic discussed? Is the article generally reporting fact or opinion? What about advertising - how do you try to separate truth from advertising hyperbole? Discuss this with your group.

Now let's apply this to the Internet. Ask the group if they know any clues that can help you decide if information on a web page or in an email is true. How can Internet users research information and claims made on the web or in email?





## Activity A: Disney Giveaway Email

Hello Disney fans,

And thank you for signing up for Bill Gates' Beta Email Tracking. My name is Walt Disney Jr. Here at Disney we are working with Microsoft which has just compiled an e-mail tracing program that tracks everyone to whom this message is forwarded to. It does this through an unique IP (Internet Protocol) address log book database.

We are experimenting with this and need your help. Forward this to everyone you know and if it reaches 13,000 people, 1,300 of the people on the list will receive \$5,000, and the rest will receive a free trip for two to Disney World for one week during the summer of 1999 at our expense. Enjoy.

Note: Duplicate entries will not be counted. You will be notified by email with further instructions once this email has reached 13,000 people.

Your friends,  
Walt Disney Jr., Disney, Bill Gates  
& The Microsoft Development Team.

Is this email true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## **Activity B: “Good Times” Email**

Here is some important information. Beware of a file called Goodtimes.

Happy Chanukah everyone, and be careful out there. There is a virus on America Online being sent by E-Mail. If you get anything called "Good Times", DON'T read it or download it. It is a virus that will erase your hard drive.

Forward this to all your friends. It may help them a lot.

Is this email true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

### **Activity C: Blue Mountain Cards Email**

Just wanted to forward along some info I received today from a VERY reliable source. Do not open cards from Blue Mountain Arts until further notice. Apparently a hacker got into their system and it's infected. If you open cards from them, your system crashes.

Pass this along to anyone you may know that uses Blue Mountain.

Is this email true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## **Activity D: Virus Alert**

Virus Alert: July Killer / W97M\_Autoexec

There is a new computer virus in existence that infects computers running the Chinese version of Windows and Word 97. Even though this virus has only been seen in Asia, Word documents transmitted from Asia via the Internet could be infected. For more information about the virus, please visit our virus alerts webpage at:  
<http://www.helpdesk.umd.edu/alerts>.

Is this alert true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## Activity E: Screen Saver Virus Email

>Subject: Virus Warning  
>Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii  
>Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit  
>  
>> Subject: VIRUS WARNING PASS IT ON!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
>>  
>> Someone is sending out a very desirable screen  
>> saver, A Bug's Life - BUGGYLST.ZIP. If you  
>> download it, you will lose everything on your hard  
>> drive, it will crash, and someone from the Internet  
>> will get your name and password!  
>>  
>> DO NOT DOWNLOAD THIS UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES!!!!!!  
>> IT JUST WENT INTO CIRCULATION YESTERDAY.  
>>  
>> This is a new very malicious virus and not many people know about it.  
>> This information was announced yesterday morning from MICROSOFT.  
>> Please share it with everyone that might access the Internet.  
>> Once again, pass this along to EVERYONE in your address book so that this  
>> may be stopped.  
>> Also do not open or even look at any mail that says RETURNED OR UNABLE  
>> TO DELIVER.  
>> This virus will attach itself to your computer components and render them  
>> useless. Immediately delete mail items that say this. America Online (AOL)  
>> has said that this is a very dangerous virus and that there is NO remedy for it  
>> at this time.  
>>  
>> Thank you

Is this email true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## **Activity F: Gang Initiation Email**

If you're ever driving after dark and see an on-coming car with no headlights turned on, DO NOT flash your lights at them! This is a common gang member "initiation game" that goes like this: the new gang member under initiation drives along with no headlights and the first car to flash their headlights at him is now his "target". He is now required to turn around and chase that car and shoot at or into the car in order to complete his initiation requirements. Make sure you share this info with all the drivers in your family!!

Stay safe!!

Is this email true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## Activity G: Chromium Picolinate Web Page #1

Chromium Picolinate, a safe, effective nutrient that was originally developed in the nutrition laboratories of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Chromium Picolinate, along with our special blend of herbs, is a scientific breakthrough that is absolutely revolutionary! Chromium Picolinate was developed by the USDA and distributed under exclusive governmental license and the good news is we were recently granted distribution access. CP-ZOOM is a proven winner !!!

### **Why Diets Don't Work !**

Most dieters the achieve significant weight loss lose far too much (Aprox. 30%) lean body mass (muscle and organic tissue). This not only diminishes strength and agility, but effects appearance as well. With less muscle, pleasing curves flatten, chests sink, and arms and legs look spindly. Making things worse, this lessened lean body mass lowers the metabolic rate, making it harder to keep the weight off permanently. This is known as the "Yo-Yo diet" syndrome.

### **What is Chromium Picolinate?**

Chromium Picolinate is an organic complex, a definite compound of trivalent chromium and Picolinic acid. This product has been Patented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is licensed under U.S. patent 33,988 .

### **Daily Need**

According to U.S. Department of agriculture studies (who originally developed chromium picolinate), 9 out of 10 Americans get less than 50 Micrograms of chromium as compared to the 50 to 200 micrograms recommended by the National Academy of Sciences. Supplementation of 3 tablets of CP-ZOOM taken daily after breakfast provides 300 micrograms of this vital nutrient.

### **The Rest of Our Story**

For thousand of years the Chinese have used herbal remedies. Our product is synergistically designed using the same natural ingredients that the Chinese have seemingly always known about. Chromium Picolinate, 300 micrograms per 3 tablets taken once a day.

Is this web page true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## Activity H: Chromium Picolinate Web Page #2

Chromium picolinate is a product being marketed heavily through health food stores, supplement peddlers and weight loss/fitness centers. Despite its claims for building muscle, reducing body fat, decreasing weight or increasing strength, it does none of those things.

In the case of chromium picolinate, it's a case of taking a little research on metal picolates and stretching it way beyond its intent and safety. A USDA chemist, Gary Evans, about a decade ago while working in the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center in Grand Forks, N.D., came up with a way to make a group of metal picolates

Unfortunately, the research evidence produced by Evans is flawed. The research cited in the company's publicity was either produced by himself, others involved in the marketing or from personal communications. Other studies are said to be "in press..." Hank Lukaski, Research Leader at the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Human Nutrition Research Center in Grand Forks has been critical of the claims and disavows any connection with the product. Others have also found the claims "preposterous" and have warned users, especially athletes taking large quantities, of possible physiological disorders and lowered iron status.

Some studies have attempted to critically examine the role of chromium picolinate in muscle building because it is being promoted as an anabolic steroid alternative in health food stores and other locations with access to athletes. One such study had 35 healthy young men involved in a vigorous strength training program divided into three groups. During eight weeks of strength training, one group was given chromium picolinate, the second, chromium chloride, and the third, a placebo (a compound without active ingredients). As expected, all three groups increased strength because of the training, but no differences could be found despite careful testing between the three groups in body weight, body composition or strength.

It certainly is false to claim that chromium picolinate will do any of the following: "Melts the fat away." "No dieting, no exercise required." "Lose the fat, keep the muscle." "Metabolic rate is raised to burn off calories."

Another study in Massachusetts found that chromium picolinate supplements were ineffective in changing either body composition or strength in nine weeks of weight-lifting by football players. However the major effect noted was a great increase in urinary chromium loss.

Thus chromium picolinate is not an insulin replacement nor a body-builder. It will not redistribute fat once it settles into its "home" in a fat cell.

Source: Berg, Frances, Chromium picolinate still hot on the market. *Healthy Weight Journal*. 8 (4):73-74. Jul-Aug. 1994.

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Is this web page true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.

## Activity I: The Price They Paid

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the revolutionary army, another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the revolutionary war. They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in rags.

Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Ellery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight, and unwavering, they pledged: "For the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of the divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

They gave you and me a free and independent America. The history books never told you a lot of what happened in the revolutionary war. We didn't just fight the British. We were British subjects at that time and we fought our own government! Perhaps you can now see why our founding fathers had a hatred for standing armies, and allowed through the second amendment for everyone to be armed.

Is this web page true or false? Follow the clues, collect the evidence and be prepared to share your results with the group.







