

## ***Teaching Brief/GIFT***

# **Respecting Students' Privacy Boundaries and Media Use Preferences while Teaching with Online Digital Tools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Course requirements involving submissions on publicly viewable websites have the potential to cross or violate privacy boundaries. Building on Petronio's Communication Privacy Management Theory, I reflect on these challenges and the ways that I have found to give students choices and control over both their uses and personal information, and offer an example of such strategies through assignments I use in teaching concepts related to digital literacy, which I call "Online Activity Journals."

*Keywords:* privacy, social media, online tools, interactive media, digital literacy, Communication Privacy Management Theory

### **Rationale**

In an undergraduate course I teach called Interactive Media and Society, one of my main pedagogical objectives is to engage students in the critical dimension of digital literacy, encouraging “a more systematic understanding of how the media operate, and ... more reflective use of the media” (Buckingham, 2008, p. 115). To that end, several years ago, I came up with the idea that I would ask a student to volunteer to be “googled” in front of the class, as a way of showing the students that personal information is more public and easily accessible than many realize in the digital age. The very first time I tried this, it went disastrously wrong. An earnest, outgoing, and personable young lady was the first to volunteer. I pulled up her google results and began scrolling through the list of links projecting aspects of her past accomplishments, along with links to and images from her social media profiles. As I began summarizing out loud what we were looking at, I unexpectedly glimpsed a headline and excerpted passage from a news article about a sibling of hers who had died tragically, her own name bolded as one of the grieving family members. I quickly closed the page and moved on without mentioning it, but I could see on her face and those of some classmates that they had seen it, too. My point had been made – you may not realize what kind of information is online about you – but the more powerful lesson was for me.

My instructional objective had been achieved at the expense of this student’s privacy and ability to control what kinds of information about herself she wanted to disclose to her peers. It was then that I soberly realized the responsibility that we as educators have to protect students’ privacy as they willingly put their trust in us to guide them through the perilous terrain of digital media. Particularly in classes that emphasize the intended and unintended consequences of technology, it is inappropriate to simply treat it as a “transparent or neutral ‘teaching aid’” (Buckingham, 2007, p. 50). If we want to encourage our students to be more thoughtful about their uses of digital media, then we should be as well.

### **Privacy Violations**

Petronio’s (1991) Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory suggests that all of our interpersonal relationships rely on a coordination of, and respect for, boundaries surrounding the solicitation and sharing of private information. This information necessarily includes student work requested by teachers, and some students may be less comfortable sharing their submissions beyond the boundaries of that

relationship than others. In a review of the literature applying CPM, Petronio and Child (2020) found the online context complicates people's ability to manage their own privacy boundaries when sharing information, but they are still aware of the possibility for violations and make efforts to mitigate them.

When it comes to privacy on the Internet, even when personal information is freely and voluntarily shared, violations are still experienced when something happens that leads to unwanted or unexpected exposure (Barnes, 2006). The research on the use of publicly accessible digital tools in the classroom supports the notion that privacy concerns are held by both professors and students (Hickerson & Kothari, 2017). Attempts to fully integrate tools like social networking sites into formal learning environments have been shown to receive negative reviews from students, in part because of privacy issues (Tess, 2013). Rodriguez (2011) adds the broader legal context:

Even though social media tools being used do not collect enough personally identifiable data to threaten FERPA laws in most cases, the issue of student privacy in the broader context is still one that should be strongly considered. There was once a time when events that happened in a classroom were ephemeral and intangible, restricted to only the participants present and the extent that their memory would retain them. Using mediated tools that capture discussions and activities in an open public space fixes these events for digital perpetuity and makes them potentially available to a world audience. (p. 543)

To be sure, requiring students to sign up for and use a publicly available website as a part of their participation in a class borders an ethical gray area. Respecting students' privacy also extends to their media use preferences, especially when it comes to social media. Students who choose not to have a profile on certain sites for personal reasons are asked to set those reasons aside when the use of the site is a class requirement. On the other hand, for those students who do already use a required site, the instructor gains access to their entire profile, history, and a feed, which they would not otherwise have been likely to access, creating the potential for unintentional violations of privacy. Engaging students in activities and exercises that involve digital media and technology means that we must be sensitive to the potential consequences of their uses.

**Critical Digital Literacy**

Despite these challenges, courses that teach media or digital literacy gain huge instructional advantages by engaging students with the products of their study (Jenkins et al., 2006). Most students today are fully immersed in the online world, and their uses already extend to their informal learning as well (Bulfin & North, 2007). Yet despite their typically frequent use of digital tools, many students fall short of using them for their “full potential of being a competent student, an empowered employee or an engaged citizen” (Meyers et al., 2013, p. 355). For that, they need to break away from the mundane and the typical in order to reflect on a more distanced, thoughtful, perspective of technology.

Pangrazio (2016) referred to this kind of reflection as “transcendental critique” and recommended it as an ideal way to achieve critical digital literacy. Fortunately, this specific pedagogical objective is also particularly suited to activities that break students away from, rather than integrate, the ways that they already use digital tools and media (which is where privacy issues most tend to arise). Pangrazio (2016) offers three main approaches to engaging students in transcendental critique: 1) visualization, 2) critical self-reflection, and 3) interpretation and re-articulation of digital concepts. I add a fourth category to Pangrazio’s list: 4) digital artifact analysis. In my class, I address each of these categories through the implementation of a weekly “Online Activity Journal” that requires students to complete, and then reflect on, an activity in the online world (see Appendix A for assignment examples and instructions). None of these assignments require students to engage with digital media in invasive ways, and they are intentionally constructed with flexibility so as to maintain the integrity of students’ privacy boundaries and media use preferences. I provide more detail on how this is accomplished in the following sections.

**Activity****Visualization**

Pangrazio (2016) suggests that data visualization can be used to “to decontextualise or defamiliarise digital texts, tools and practices with the goal of suspending or interrupting commonly held assumptions and views” (p. 171). Conveniently, there are several open data visualization tools that can be explored without requiring a log-in or profile; I use Google Trends ([trends.google.com](https://trends.google.com)), the Wayback Machine ([archive.org](https://archive.org)), and Wikipedia statistics ([Wikipedia.org](https://wikipedia.org)) in three separate weekly Online Activity Journals

(see “Track a Trend,” “The WayBack Machine,” and “Wikipedia” in Appendix A).

When I have students explore these tools, I give them the website URL along with a set of instructions to follow. They then answer a series of questions that guide them through a summary of their experience, with a particular focus on observations that align with the concepts for that week. For example, when exploring the Wikipedia statistics, I ask students, “Are there any users who appear to edit this page on a regular basis?” This directly addresses a class concept about the inequality of contributions that can occur in the “open-source” model of informal, online, group collaboration. A final requirement for these assignments is that students directly apply at least two concepts from the week’s readings to their observations.

### **Critical Self-Reflection**

Having students reflect on the digital media practices they already engage in “becomes a way in which the individual can move between the personal and the ideological while exploring and analysing concepts that are embedded in digital technologies and networks” (Pangrazio, 2016, pp. 171-2). It also allows instructors to guide students toward new understandings without requiring them to engage in any additional digital media uses beyond what they are already doing for the purposes of the class. Three Online Activity Journals in which I use this approach require students to reflect on: 1) the last medium they used before starting their assignment, as a way of guiding them through concepts related to media use protocols and media convergence (“Communication Protocols” in Appendix A), 2) their own “filter bubble,” by comparing a frequented website across devices or with a cooperating friend’s device/log-in (“The Filter Bubble” in Appendix A), and 3) their own personal data found on Google and public records aggregators like peekyou.com and spokeo.com (an extended and more private version of the in-class activity I opened this essay with, see “Your Data” in Appendix A).

In the past, I have had students report their journal reflections using either individual assignment submissions – for my eyes only – or via online student discussions, which all of their classmates see and may respond to. There are benefits to both formats, but, either way, students are in control of the level of personal detail that they reveal, and they are fully aware of the audience with whom they are communicating. Still, if one were to vary the format by week, it is these three weeks in which

the reflections are most personal, thus the individual submissions may be more preferable.

### **Interpretation and Re-Articulation of Digital Concepts**

In her third and final recommendation, Pangrazio (2016) suggests examining the rhetoric typically ascribed to concepts in digital media studies in order to call into question some of the more positive terms associated with its use. She explains that the mostly positive connotations “conceal some of the more complex and confronting issues of digital media use” (p. 172).

While this objective could be directly addressed through class discussions focused on the terms themselves, I have found evaluative comparisons as particularly useful in guiding students to this realization experientially. For example, during the week in which we cover amateur media, I have students find an example of an amateur-produced remix and evaluate its quality on a variety of dimensions (see “Evaluate a Remix” in Appendix A). After they first consider its artistic and aesthetic aspects, they are then asked to consider ethical dimensions of authorship, ownership, and copyright – the downside of “participatory” culture. In another week, students compare citizen coverage of a chosen news story to that of a professional news organization as a way of exploring both the good and the bad outcomes of democratized news production (see “News Item Comparison” in Appendix A). In a third example, students engage with a large language model artificial intelligence platform of their choosing to ask it advice, probe it on a topic on which they are expert, and make some creative contributions, all of which they evaluate and compare with their experiences of humans doing the same (see “AI Chatbots” in Appendix A). These comparative/evaluative weeks are especially conducive to the online class discussion format, as students conduct a second level of comparison with their classmates’ chosen examples/topics, collaboratively generating further insights into these concepts.

### **Digital Artifact Analysis**

In my experience, digital artifact analysis seems an appropriate fourth approach for achieving Pangrazio’s (2016) “transcendental critique.” This type of analysis involves guiding students through an exploration of the social, cultural, or political processes evidenced or embedded in chosen digital objects of study. For example, I have a weekly Online Activity Journal in which students evaluate a selected online community for collective intelligence (“Investigate a Group or

Community” in Appendix A), another looking at social network processes in a public group from a city of their choosing on Meetup.com (another site which does not require a sign-in to browse, see “Meetup.com” in Appendix A), and a third assessing the transmedia marketing strategies found via the website of a chosen brand (“Investigate a Brand in Appendix A).

Keeping assignment options open is another way to give students control over what they choose to share. For example, for the online community evaluation, students are not required to discuss a group for which they are a member, but that is certainly one possibility they can choose. They are not instructed to have a profile on a particular group-forming site like Facebook or Reddit in order to do the assignment, but both of these are options they may employ. Once again, the activities are designed such that it is left entirely up to the student how personal they want to get with the choices they make in response to my instructions and questions.

### **Assessment**

In sum, having students use digital media for the purpose of class assignments and activities without violating their privacy and preference boundaries is entirely possible, with a bit of creativity and flexibility. In fact, student learning objectives within the realm of critical digital literacy are particularly conducive to this kind of effort. The Online Activity Journal is not the only assignment format that can accomplish this goal, but it does reveal some pedagogical strategies that can assist in such an endeavor: using open tools that allow exploration without a log-in; assigning self-reflection of pre-existing uses; and building in modality and topic choices. Specifically, an assignment structure that gives students control over the level of personal information they are willing to share and the tools they choose to employ can inspire conceptual understanding without forcing students cross their own personal boundaries. Further, a mixed submission process may be preferable, in which those activities that may get more personal could be submitted to the instructor only, and those that would benefit from broader comparisons may be submitted as a class discussion. Finally, as always with digital media assignments, the instructions dealing with a specific website or app will need to be revisited each term to ensure that they still accurately guide students through the proper pathways to find what they need, but also to ensure that the sites are still open and accessible without a log-in. For instance, for the “Track

a Trend” activity (see Appendix A), I used to have all students search the term on Twitter. When the platform changed to require a log-in for search, however, I had to expand it to allow students to search the feed of a social media site of their choosing, so they would not feel pressured to sign up for a specific one. In general, these strategies may be utilized in a variety of situations, activities, and exercises that one may wish to employ in their classes as ways of engaging students in the digital world, without approaching the ethically murky waters of incorporating the obligatory use of specific, publicly-accessible digital platforms.



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## Appendix A

### Online Activity Journals

Note: All Online Activity Journals end with the following instruction: “Conclude with a summary paragraph, making 2-3 connections to the week’s readings and concepts and explaining how they applied to this activity. Describe any other thoughts you had about this assignment, including any struggles you might have had with this activity or making connections to class readings.”

### Communication Protocols

Post a response addressing the following questions:

1. Before you logged into Moodle to do this assignment today, what was the last medium you used or interacted with (interactive or otherwise)? What was your purpose and goal for using this medium?
2. What are some of the communication protocols associated with this medium? In other words: How did you gain access to it? What are the typical uses of this medium? What are some norms or characteristics that you have come to expect from it?
3. Did this medium exist before the rise of computers and the internet in the 1990s, or is it a type of “new” / interactive media?
4. What kind of content did you access there? Did you consume (read / watch / listen) or produce (write / post / submit) it? Would you characterize it as personal or public? Was it professional or amateur?
5. Where do you think it would fall in the media convergence ecosystem graphic\*? Did it move back and forth between categories as you used it?

\* available from author upon request

### The WayBack Machine

In this activity, we will be using the “Wayback Machine” found at <https://web.archive.org>. Choose 2 websites that you visit on a regular basis (except social media sites). One at a time, put them into the textbox next to where it says “Wayback Machine,” and click “BROWSE HISTORY.” For each one, look at the bar graph at the top of the page, which lists the years and the number of times this website was archived. Click on the first year that has a bar in it, and then click earliest date highlighted in blue on the calendar. This will allow you to see what this website looked like at that point in time (if there is nothing or very little on the page on that first date, keep clicking later dates until some content appears on the page). Try clicking on any links to navigate through the archived site (these may

or may not work, depending on how well the site was archived). Then use the bar graph at the top of the page to click forward through the years, and choose other dates at random to observe the site's evolution over time, up until it begins to look like the site as you know it today. Answer the questions below for each of the sites:

1. What was the earliest date/year this site was archived with content?
2. Describe how the site looked in the beginning, compared to how it looks today. What other notable design changes did you see as you looked through the years? Note the similarities and differences.
3. In what ways has the content or offerings of the website changed? What did they offer their audience through their website in the beginning, compared to what they offer now? Note the similarities and differences.
4. What, if anything, did they appear to have learned throughout the years about how to best use a website to reach or interact with their audience?
5. What other notable or interesting things did you notice about this website's evolution over time?

### **Investigate a Group or Community**

Find an active online community (i.e. one that has at least a hundred members and has had several posts within the last 24 hours) about a topic of interest to you. You can look for a group on a social networking site like Facebook, a subreddit on Reddit, a popular list or hashtag on Twitter or Instagram, or just try googling "online community" with a topic of your choice to see if you can find one. If you already belong to such a community, you may discuss that one. Join the community and read through the archives to observe what goes on there.

Address the following questions:

1. What is the main topic of the community?
2. What social tools and features does the community offer?
3. Are you able to get a sense of how the community is organized (i.e. different topic sections, different types of activities that go on there)?
4. What is the most active section or feature of the site?
5. Describe the general tone and nature of the community (i.e. are its members friendly and supportive, or sarcastic and combative? Do the comments generally have a lighthearted or serious tone? Etc.)
6. Describe any community norms that are evidenced, either through the features of the site itself or the activity you observe there (i.e. there

might be a labeling system in place for member level activity, or you might notice new members introducing themselves in a dedicated “introductions” section).

7. Describe one example where you saw knowledge-sharing taking place between members.

### **Meetup.com**

Imagine you’re a journalist at a newspaper in a large city (you pick the city) and your editor asks you to write a local story about one of the following topics (choose ONE):

- what independent musicians/bands from the area are up and coming
- how singles find one another in the local dating scene
- growing activist networks in the city
- local charities and what they are doing for their community
- how people achieve healthy lifestyles living in the city
- up-and-coming fashion trends

To begin research on your topic of interest, go to <https://www.meetup.com/find/groups/>. Put a search term or phrase that is relevant to your chosen topic in the “Search for anything” box, and the city of your choice in the box next to it (it may already be populated with your current location, but feel free to change it).

Try to find a group that is public, relevant to your topic, and has at least 25 members. Spend some time becoming familiar with both group’s meetup site by clicking through the various tabs, reading reviews, comments and posts, looking at events and pictures, etc. Note the following:

1. How long has this group existed (see “Founded on” in the left sidebar)?
2. How many members does it have?
3. How often do they meet and for what purpose(s)?
4. What information have you already learned that might be useful for your article (i.e can you get a sense of who they are, their opinions, or what they do)?
5. If you “met up” with this group at their next event, what questions would you plan to ask of the members?
6. Do you think this is a good place to begin your research for this article? Why or why not?

### **Evaluate a Remix**

On YouTube or another video-sharing site, find an example of an amateur-produced re-mix, mash-up, parody, cover or other form that uses content

from a professional media source and reinterprets it in a new way (known as media appropriation). Include a link to the video and briefly describe both it and the original content it appropriated.

Write up a detailed response giving your personal reaction to this video.

This response should include answers to the following questions:

1. How would you evaluate this video's quality? Aspects of the video you may want to consider can include its production value and entertainment value.
2. What can you find out about why this video was created and by whom? What do you think the goal or purpose of the video was?
3. Would you say this video was successful or unsuccessful? Explain how you are interpreting successful/unsuccessful in your response.
4. Would it have been possible to create or share this video without access to interactive media? How do you think that might have been accomplished?
5. Consider for a moment how the creators of the original, professional content that was used might feel. Do you think they should be upset that their content was appropriated? Why or why not?
6. Do you think it was ethical for the producers of this remix to appropriate the original content and share it in their own video online? Why or why not?

### **News Item Comparison**

Choose a current event or recent news story that is of interest to you (if you are having trouble coming up with one, see the top stories listed at <https://www.allsides.com/>). Search the topic on YouTube to find a video from a well-known, professional news outlet covering the story (look for names you recognize and the grey checkmark verifying a professional outlet as the source). Then find an amateur video covering the same issue or event from YouTube or another platform (e.g. TikTok, Rumble) - it does not have to include actual footage, they can just be talking about it. (On Youtube, it may be easier to find these if you click on "Filter" and choose the "Creative Commons" option under "Features." Look for less professional sounding usernames unlikely to have the grey checkmark). When you have found two reports, include the URLs to both and compare and contrast them, addressing the following:

1. Summarize the main point / perspective expressed in each.
2. Note and describe any similarities (in ideas, information, or presentation) between them.

3. Note and describe any differences (in ideas, information, or presentation) between them.
4. Place each report into one of the following categories (and explain why you categorized it that way):
  - News
  - Opinion
  - Entertainment
  - Other?
5. Explain which report you liked better and why.

**Wikipedia**

Go onto Wikipedia and find an article about a topic of interest to you. Note the title of the article you chose in your response. Click the “View history” tab – this lists the revisions made to the page. If you are not familiar with how to read/understand this list, see the Wikipedia help article at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Page\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Page_history). Take a few minutes to look at the list and become familiar with the features, and click on the “Revision History Statistics” link to learn more about the history of this page. Note the following:

1. How recently was the last edit made?
2. About how often are edits made to this article?
3. Are there any users who appear to edit this page on a regular basis? (Note their usernames or, if anonymous, their IP addresses.)
4. Anything else you discovered or of note?

Go back to the article and click on the “Talk” tab on the left – this is a wiki version of a discussion board, where users discuss what is in the article. (If there is nothing there, it may have been recently archived. Click the number 1 next to “Archives” to see what the talk page most recently looked like). Read through this page and write down the following:

1. What types of things are being discussed? The topic, the article, both? Something else?
2. Is there evidence of knowledge sharing (i.e. are there debates going on, are people presenting diverse perspectives or viewpoints)? If so, describe it.
3. What have you learned about how knowledge is produced, and disseminated, through Wikipedia? How is this different than a professionally produced encyclopedia?
4. What do you think about the fact that people are doing all of this work for free, without getting paid?

### **Investigate a Brand**

Go to the official website of one of your favorite “brands” (i.e. a product, program, film, sports team, franchise, band, etc.). Spend some time looking through the site to get a sense of their brand and how they reach out to the consumer. Write a response in which you include the URL of the website and describe how they address the following:

- Multiple “entry-points” into their brand through other portals (Facebook, Twitter, smartphone apps, etc.)
- “Dynamic” content (blogs, newsletters, email updates, anything that is updated with new information regularly)
- “On-demand” content (streaming video clips, downloads, etc.)
- Interactive content (games, personalization, contests, anything that allows the consumer to further interact with the product)
- Participatory content (forums, comments, polls, ratings, anything that allows the consumer to discuss the brand or give feedback)
- Other types of media / content that you find interesting or applicable

Now that you have reviewed these offerings, take a few minutes to assess them from your own perspective. In your opinion, how successful or unsuccessful are these efforts to incorporate new digital and social tools in engaging the consumer? On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this brand on its use of interactive media? What do you think this says about the company’s attitude towards its relationship with its consumers?

### **Track a Trend**

Go to <https://trends.google.com/trends/trendingsearches/daily> – this lists the top keywords or phrases that are being or have recently been searched on google over the past few days. Choose one that seems interesting to you and click on it to look at the related recent news articles. Can you get a sense of the story linked to this trend’s popularity? If so, summarize the story. If not, explain why it’s confusing.

Now click on the trend name again. This should bring you to a history of this keyword(s)’ trending - the default view is for the last year, so click the drop-down where it says “Past 7 days” and choose “2004-present” instead (2004 is as far back as it goes). Spend some time exploring this page and answer the following questions:

1. Has this keyword/phrase trended before? In other words, is there a history of peaks and valleys? Or is it a recent phenomenon, meaning the blue line only appears recently?



2. Click on the dropdown arrow next to where it says “United States” in the upper lefthand corner and choose “Worldwide.” Does this change the graph at all?
3. Then scroll down to the “Interest by region” section of the page. Explore the map a bit, and determine what countries, regions and/pr cities this search is most popular in. Why do you think that might be?
4. Scroll down to the “Related topics” and “Related queries.” Can you determine why this topic might be trending? Note anything else interesting that you learn.

Finally, paste the keyword(s) into the search at a social media site that you use (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit...). If you can, sort the results by most recent not most popular. Now consider the following questions:

1. What types of things are people are saying about this topic? Can you get a sense of the perspectives or opinions people have about it?
2. Approximately how often are they posting? Is there a hashtag that seems to be associated with this keyword?
3. Are people repeatedly linking to any websites or news articles? What are they?
4. Anything else interesting that you noticed?

### **Filter Bubble**

On a computer or device you frequently use, go to a website/app that you use on a regular basis (if necessary, log in). It can be a social media site, a news website, an online community, etc. Navigate through the site a bit as you normally would, but this time pay particular attention to the dynamic content that is displayed to you (meaning that content that is regularly updated and always changing), as well as the “periphery” content (i.e. ads, sponsored links, recommendations or suggestions on the sidebar, etc.), and consider the following questions:

1. Does the content seem to be tailored in any way? If so, were there any common themes or trends that you noticed in the tailored content?
2. Does the “periphery” content seem in any way to be related to the main content on the page?
3. Does any of this content seem particularly tailored to your demographic (i.e. age, location, gender, etc.)?
4. Does it seem like any of this content might be in some way related to you personally - your specific interests, profile, or individual browsing or posting history?

5. Do you feel that the messages, themes and trends you noticed attempt to reflect something about who you are? If so, do you feel that it is an accurate reflection?

Now go to the same site/app with a different computer or device (perhaps a friend's or in a computer lab), or, if possible, log in with a different account.

1. Were there any significant differences in the dynamic or peripheral content? If so, what were they?
2. Why do you think there were, or were not, differences?
3. Did you find evidence of the filter bubble in your version of this experiment? If not, why do you think that might be? And if so, do you think that this is a good, a bad thing, or neither?

### **Your Data**

Click through the various results you get as you conduct the following tasks, and take notes on what you discover.

1. Google your name. Are there results related to you? If not, try putting your name in quotes and/or adding your location to the search. What can you find?
2. Now Google your address (the one you have lived in longest, probably your home address). Click on the maps link that is provided, and then click on "Satellite" view. Zoom in to get the best view you can of your home. (Other options to play around with If available: click on the "3D" option and zoom in, or drag the little yellow man onto any nearby blue road for Streetview. Once in Streetview, you can drag to turn around and click on the date to see what this spot looked like at certain points in the past). Are you surprised at what you see? Why or why not?
3. Now go to [www.peakyou.com](http://www.peakyou.com). Try searching on your name, name and location, and usernames that you use. Did you get any results?
4. Next go to [www.peoplefinders.com](http://www.peoplefinders.com). Try your name under the name tab, email under the email tab, phone number under the phone tab, and address under the address tab. What kind of results did you get this time?
5. Finally, go to [www.spokeo.com](http://www.spokeo.com). Put in various data again to try and find yourself. What did you get?
6. What did you find out? Anything surprising or unexpected? Anything erroneous or incorrect?

7. What were the differences between the types of results you found with the different technologies (google, peekyou, and spokeo)?
8. Had you ever done any of these before?

For comparison, now do some or all of steps 1-5 for a friend or family member who you don't think would mind you looking them up. Answer the questions above for them as well. What, if anything, might you conclude from this comparison?

### **AI Chatbots**

Using an Artificially Intelligent (AI) chat app such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok, or My AI (on Snapchat), engage in the following interactions:

1. Ask the AI chatbot to explain something about topic you have in-depth knowledge about, and hit the little arrow to send it. Read through its response. Post a few follow up questions to learn more and probe its accuracy, asking for more detail or clarification for instance. What was your question, and how accurate were the AI chatbot's responses, compared to what you know about this concept or topic? Did it get anything wrong? Did you learn anything new from it?
2. Provide a prompt for a creative piece - a story, a poem, a song, a joke, a comedy skit, a movie scene - about a topic of your choosing. You can be as specific or generic as you like. Try this a few different times, asking for different genres or styles each time. You can even specify the style of a famous individual if you want. What were your requests, and how were the responses similar or different each time?
3. Think of a personal dilemma you are currently struggling with (e.g. an argument with a roommate) or challenge you are facing (e.g. an upcoming job interview). Explain the situation to the chatbot and ask it what you should do. Feel free to post a few follow up questions if you wish. What did you ask the chatbot, and what did you think of its advice? Did it offer any insight you hadn't considered? Was any of it bad advice?
4. Most AI chatbots will not give you opinions, but you can ask an open-ended question about a controversial political or cultural issue, topic, or figure you are interested in understanding better. Ask a few follow up questions to probe its answers. You can even try asking leading questions with differing political biases about the same issue to see how the response differs. What did you ask it about and did you learn anything from it? Do you disagree with anything it said, or did it

change your mind about anything? Did you find it to be more biased in one direction or another, or was it relatively balanced?

5. Had you ever interacted with this AI chatbot or others like it before? What did you think? Did you feel like you were talking to another person, or did it feel more like a performance to you?
6. How could this be beneficial to you, in the future? How might it be problematic?