

LESSON 14

What the algorithm decides you see

40 minutes

Evaluating Online Content

Outcome 2.6

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

Explore how algorithms decide the order of posts in your feeds and recommendations. Act as the algorithm to rank content and compare different goals like keeping you scrolling or informed. Understand the trade-offs involved.

CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Outcome	What the specification asks for
2.6	Investigate the role of algorithms in how information is presented online

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Investigate the role of algorithms in how information is presented online (LO 2.6)
- Explain in plain terms how feeds, search results and recommendations are ordered
- Name the trade-off when a feed chases scrolling, informing, or newest-first

BEFORE THE BELL

- Open the feed-ranker interactive on the teacher device before the class arrives, so you know it loads. The five posts and their tags are already set up in it.

What the algorithm decides you see

HOW THE LESSON RUNS

4 min	introduction	Start
5 min	content	Examine and discuss
14 min	activity	Hands-on: be the algorithm
7 min	activity	Your turn
5 min	content	Make sense
3 min	content	Reflect
2 min	summary	What you covered

TEACHING MOVES

- Keep Examine and discuss to the definition and key question only; the three place-examples live in the ranker teacher notes.
- In the hands-on, aim for a quick human top-two, then two goals in class, with Show newest first as a teacher demo if time is tight.
- Use student contributions from Your turn (or from the hands-on) to demonstrate the three goals in the Make sense step.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Viewing the algorithm as a person; remind students it is software following rules based on signals.
- Treating the three goals as the same in effect, or treating ranking as neutral magic; have students name what each one promotes and what it pushes down, without ranking the goals as good or bad.
- Overlooking trade-offs; prompt students to name what is lost when chasing one goal.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Support: Offer sentence frames for describing feed goals and signals.
- Extension: Challenge students to invent a fourth goal and predict its effects.
- Support: Allow paired work on the ranking activity for collaborative discussion.