Evaluating Sources

Accuracy, Authority, Objectivity, Currency, and Coverage

If these criteria are present then you may have a high quality source in terms of both credibility and applicability that could be of value to your research. If they are not present, be wary of utilizing this source for your research.

**Accuracy** refers to a source's reliability. Information such as statistics and quotes provided in a source need to be verifiable so that the reader can confirm both that the information is accurate and that the author's conclusion is reasonable. Below are some questions to ask when determining the level of a source's accuracy.

- Does the author provide a source for the statistics or quotes used in an article?
- Is the information utilized referred to specifically or in a vague manner?
- Can that statistic or quote be verified by a reliable second source?
- Are the statistics presented in a nondeceptive manner? Sometimes statistics can be correct but still misleading

**Authority** refers to the credibility of the author or institution of the source. If you want to use a source for your research, make sure the authority of that source is reliable and trustworthy. Below are some questions to ask when determining the level of a source's authority.

- Is the author's contact information listed? If not, or if written anonymously, there is no one to hold accountable for the information provided.
- What is the author's credentials? If not provided, be skeptical of their credibility.
- What is the author or organization's area of expertise? Are they an authority on the topic being discussed?
- Is the author affiliated with an accredited educational or respected research institution?

**Objectivity** is assessing to what degree does an author's bias affect how and what information is presented. A lack of objectivity can be problematic as the author may misrepresent or misinterpret information. An author's bias may also manifest itself in an omission of information of relevant or important information as well. Bias does not necessarily invalidate an author's work, but it should alert you that a counterargument source may need to be acquired to balance your research. Below are some questions to ask when determining the level of a source's objectivity or bias.
Does the information appear to be fact, opinion, or propaganda?

Is the author sufficiently objective and un-biased for your research needs?

If not, what are the biases or agenda of the author and could that source be utilized as a counterargument to another source?

**Currency** refers to the timeliness of the information presented by an author. Even though you may utilize information from a credible source, if the information you choose to utilize is dated, your research may be skewed as a result, especially regarding innovations in science & technology or hot topic issues. Below are some questions to ask when determining the level of a source's currency.

- Will dated information still be relevant to your research project or do you require more up-to-date information?
- What are the dates of publication or production for various content on the website?
- Can you determine if the website has been updated recently?

**Coverage** refers to the level of substance and perspective found in a source's content. Make sure the source discusses your topic with the depth appropriate for your research. **Find sources which discuss multiple perspectives or find multiple sources with contrasting points of view to ensure ample coverage on your topic.**

- Does the source provide one or many points of view?
- Does the information presented possess the proper depth needed for your research question?
- Does the resource add new information or does it simply compile information found elsewhere?
- Would those original sources be more appropriate for use in your research?

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