

Source Evaluation

03/04/04 W.D.

Credibility

Who is the author?

Are any credentials given?

Who is the publisher?

If you can't tell the answer to the above questions or if there isn't any clear information, be suspicious. For websites, you may have to check the homepage or the "About us" page to find who is behind the site. If the source is published by a university, it is likely to be scholarly. Check the edition or for any updates on the source, further editions indicate a source has been revised and updated to reflect changes in the content and may include any omissions from the previous edition. Also, many printings or editions may indicate that the work has become a standard source in the area and is reliable.

Currency

What is the date of publication?

For websites, when was the site last updated?

Think about your topic and how important recent information is to it. Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? For a history project on the Spanish American War, currency may not be very important. For a paper on human cloning, currency would be very important.

Point of View or Bias

Is the information intended to persuade, inform, entertain or sell?

For websites, what does the address end with - .com, .edu, .gov, .org?

Are the author's opinions or point of view obvious?

There's nothing wrong with a source having a point of view, but you need to be aware of it so you can investigate the other sides of the issue. Once you have checked the source's credibility, you might have an easier time determining any bias. For example: Information on gun control written by the National Rifle Association will have a strong anti-gun control bias.

Accuracy

Are the sources for any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified?

Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?

Are any research studies and/or statistics discussed? If so are they listed in a works cited?

Generally, the presence and quality of a bibliography or works cited reflects on the attention with which the authors have prepared their work. You may not know enough about the topic to judge, so look for solid evidence, such as research studies, a bibliography or references to other sources the author used. All of these things indicate the information is based on research rather than opinion.

Coverage

Is the work a primary or secondary source?

If you were researching Robert Oppenheimer's role in the development of the atomic bomb, Oppenheimer's own writings would be one of many primary sources available on this topic. Others might include relevant government documents and contemporary newspaper and journal articles. Scholars use this primary material to generate interpretations which become secondary sources. Books, encyclopedia articles, and scholarly journal articles about Oppenheimer's role are considered secondary sources. Choose both primary and secondary sources when you have the opportunity.