



Evaluating Sources

Below are several things you can look for to determine the reliability of a source. Keep these in mind when you make selections about what sources to use in your writing.

1. **Bias and other logical fallacies.** While all texts have some sort of bias, unqualified bias that affects the soundness of evidence presented is a sign of potentially suspect information. This and other logical fallacies usually indicate unreliability.
2. **Credibility of publication.** Examine credentials and stance of the publisher. Is it a well known publisher or academic press?
3. **Author's credentials.** Evaluate the author's qualifications, background, and stance. Is the author an expert on or just interested in the issue the text explores? You can search in Google if this information is not provided.
4. **Currency of the article.** Look for the date of publication. Often, more recent sources are better, particularly for the sciences, because they reflect updated thinking and evidence. Some older sources, though, are frequently cited authorities.
5. **Accuracy of the article.** Look for prose correctness and missing information. If the text is full of mistakes, be wary of using it.
6. **Documentation and types of sources.** A site is more reliable that uses serious and scholarly sources and documents these clearly and correctly.
7. **Audience.** Consider to whom the text is directed. Are readers assumed to be educated?
8. **Length.** Consider how thorough coverage of the topic is. If the source's coverage of a topic is superficial and too brief, it might not be appropriate.

Texts on the Internet can be great sources because they are current, often free, and easy to access. Because anyone with access to and knowledge of the Web can display information there, however, the publication of information online does not necessarily mean that information is trustworthy. So you must be a critical reader. There are, then, several additional things you can look for when evaluating online sources.

1. **The sponsor of the site.** Who sponsors, or pays for, the publication of a web site can often determine the content printed on that site. Information may be slanted to favor that organization's or business's views.
2. **Contact information.** Reliable sites provide contact information so you can verify and/or ask questions about information presented on the site.
3. **The purpose of the site.** Is the site meant to inform or persuade? Is the site trying to sell something?
4. **URL.** Look at the final suffix (e.g., .net, .edu). .edu and .gov sites are often reliable.
5. **Links.** Consider where the text links and if these links are current and active.
6. **Maintenance.** Look for when the site was last updated. A web site that has not been updated in several years may include old information.