

# Evaluating Resources

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about how to determine the quality of your research sources. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. The Basics of Source Evaluation

It is important to be aware of how much online information is incomplete, outdated, misleading, or downright false. Anyone can put up a website, and once it is up, the owner may or may not enter updates or corrections on a regular basis.

Likewise, anyone can write a blog on any subject, whether or not that person actually knows much about that subject. Anyone who wishes to contribute to a Wikipedia article can do so— although the postings are moderated by editors who have to register and submit their qualifications.

### IN CONTEXT

In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression. This freedom is restricted by laws against libel (false accusations against a person) and indecency, especially child pornography, but those laws can be difficult to enforce. It is always important to look beyond the surface of a site to see who sponsors it, where the information displayed came from, and whether the site owner has a certain agenda.

In gathering information for your speech, you will want to draw on reputable, reliable sources - printed ones as well as electronic ones - because they reflect on the credibility of the message and the messenger.

In general, documents that represent quality reasoning have:

- A clearly articulated purpose and goal
- A question, problem, or issue to address
- Information, data, and evidence that is clearly relevant to the stated purpose and goals
- Inferences or interpretations that lead to conclusions based on the presented information, data, and evidence
- A frame of reference or point of view that is clearly articulated

- Assumptions, concepts, and ideas that are clearly articulated

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## 2. Credibility and Information Literacy

An additional question to ask is how credible the source is. This question can be hard to answer even with years of training and expertise. Academic researchers have been trained in the objective, impartial use of the scientific method to determine validity and reliability.

But as research is increasingly dependent on funding, and funding often brings specific points of view and agendas with it, pure research can be - and has been - compromised. You can no longer simply assume that "studies show" something without finding out who conducted the study, how it was conducted, and who funded the effort. This may sound like a lot of investigation and present quite a challenge, but again, it is worth the effort.

Information literacy is an essential skill set in the process of speech preparation. As you learn to spot key signs of information that will not serve to enhance your credibility and contribute to your presentation, you can increase your effectiveness as you research and analyze your resources.

### IN CONTEXT

Suppose you are preparing an informative speech on safety in the workplace. You might come upon a site owned by a consulting company that specializes in safety analysis. The site might give many statistics, illustrating the frequency of on-the-job accidents, repetitive motion injuries, workplace violence, and so on. But the sources of these percentage figures may not be credited. As an intelligent researcher, you need to ask yourself whether the consulting company that owns the site performed its own research to get these numbers.

Most likely it did not— so why are the sources not cited? Moreover, such a site would be unlikely to mention any free workplace safety resources available from sources such as the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Less biased sources of information would be the American Management Association, the U.S. Department of Labor, and other not-for-profit organizations that study workplace safety.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned to think about the reliability of research sources when preparing a speech or presentation. **The basics of source evaluation** include assessing a source for completeness, timeliness, trustworthiness, and quality reasoning. Other aspects of **credibility and information literacy**, such as whether a source has been paid for or otherwise sponsored by a party with a financial interest in the research, should be considered when assessing a source.

Best of luck in your learning!

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