

Evaluating Sources of Information

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the significance of evaluating sources. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Credible Sources

All sources are not created equal. Especially in the age of the internet, there is so much readily accessible information that it is important for academic purposes to distinguish between the merits of different sources. You need to be able to identify trustworthy or credible sources.

A **credible source** is written by an author or authors who are experts in the field and whose conclusions are evidence-based and not motivated by profit or any interest other than scholarly pursuit. Recall that publication in a peer-reviewed journal is a marker of credibility; this is also true of books published by university presses like Harvard University Press or Stanford University Press.



TERM TO KNOW

Credible Source

A source that you can use with confidence in a paper or project because you know that it was written by an expert whose conclusions were evidence-based and not motivated by profit or any other interest other than scholarly pursuit or knowledge sharing.

2. Questionable Sources

A **questionable source** may not be credible. Wikipedia can be a great resource for students, but it is a great example of a questionable source because its content is user-generated. If a source is credible, its author is identified. The author's credentials can be investigated if they are not provided somewhere in the source.

The development of the internet has exponentially increased the possibilities for self-publishing. The resulting proliferation of authors, vast numbers of whom have no discernible qualifications, requires diligent vetting.

In many cases, a source can be questionable if its information is out of date. Unless the historical context is relevant to your work, you want your sources to be recent; scholars build on each other's work, so the relevant conversations in a particular field can evolve and change rapidly.

IN CONTEXT

You found an article on the web that you want to use for your research paper on genetically modified organisms, but you are not sure if it's credible. How do you go about deciding?

- Start with the author. Is the author identified? Are any biographical information or credentials supplied?
- How about the website—is it associated with any organization or institution?
- What are the letters at the end of the web address? Generally, .edu (education) and .gov (government) would be considered credible sources. A .com or .net ending can be purchased by any individual, so that doesn't really help you determine credibility. Similarly, a .org ending indicates a non-profit organization, which might have a biased agenda.
- Does the article cite its own sources?
- Is the article properly edited or are there errors in spelling, grammar, etc.?
- Does the website look professionally made or a little amateurish? Are there advertisements on the website?



TERM TO KNOW

Questionable Source

A source of information that doesn't appear to meet the criteria of a credible source. Generally, questionable sources should not be used, or if they are, appropriate context should be provided.



SUMMARY

Credible sources are those that are trustworthy because you can validate that they were written and vetted by experts. **Questionable sources** are those that you cannot validate. They may not be credible. Use credible sources instead of questionable ones.



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