

EVALUATING THE CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION SOURCES

Use the RADAR Framework to help you judge if information is credible and make an informed decision about the appropriate use of a source for your research.

RATIONALE

- What is the intended purpose? (to inform, to argue, to persuade, to sell, etc.)
- Who is the intended audience of this source (those with knowledge of a specific discipline or the general public?)
- Is there a sponsor or advertising? Who pays to make this information available?

AUTHORITY

CHECK THE AUTHOR'S CREDIBILITY

- Who is the author/s?
- What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations?
- What makes the author qualified to write about the topic?

CHECK THE SOURCE

- Is the source reliable?
- What is the type of publication in which the article appears? (scholarly journal, magazine, newspaper, trade, blog, etc.)
- Is the publisher of the information commercial, academic, governmental, other?

DATE

CHECK THE TIMELINESS/CURRENCY

- What is the date of publication?
- To what extent is the timeliness of the information crucial to your research?

ACCURACY

DETERMINE THE ACCURACY AND QUALITY OF THE INFORMATION

- Is the information primarily fact or opinion?
- What are the author's biases?
- To what extent does the author present multiple sides of issues?
- Was the information reviewed by editors or subject experts before it was published?
- Can you verify the information in multiple sources?

EXAMINE THE SUPPORT

- What evidence is provided for claims?
- Are sources cited, and if so, how?
- Are the referenced sources reliable and trustworthy? Follow links and citations.
- Does the provided evidence back up the author's claims?

RELEVANCE

- Does the information support your ideas and answer your research question?

OVERALL EVALUATION

To what extent is it a credible source? Is it appropriate for your purpose?

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Low Credibility High Credibility

EVALUATION TIPS IN A “POST-TRUTH” WORLD

TRIANGULATE: CHECK THE SOURCE AGAINST ITSELF AND OTHERS

Open a new window and do a search about the publication, website, and/or author. Don't rely on “About” pages alone to answer this question. See what others say about the organization, publisher, or author.

- Check the other stories and headlines on the site to see if it seems like a credible publication.
- Do all the stories lead back to the same source? If so, be suspicious.

VERIFY WITH FACT-CHECKING SITES

- FactCheck.org
- Fact Checker (The Washington Post)
- Hoax Slayer
- Politifact
- Snopes

BE CAUTIOUS WITH TRUSTING THE QUALITY OF GOOGLE’S ORDER OF SEARCH RESULTS

Don't trust the order of Google's search results as a prime indicator of quality. Go further than the top results.

SUSPECT SENSATIONAL HEADLINES AND STORIES

Exaggerated or provocative headlines are often “clickbait.” Don't stop at the headline; keep exploring.

INSPECT THE URL

Look carefully at the URL, especially the domain. Fake sites are adding .co and .lo after what looks like a legitimate URL.

INSPECT IMAGES

Check if images are altered or taken from another context by using a reverse image search on Google Images or TinEye.

READ Laterally

Read from a variety of reputable sources, and know who/what is behind those sources.

CHECK YOUR BIASES

Confirmation bias leads people to put more stock in information that confirms their beliefs and discount information that doesn't.