

# Evaluating Sources In-Depth Guide



CCMS Library

You should ask yourself the following questions when deciding whether to use a particular source:

1. What are the author's credentials?
2. What is the purpose of the source?
3. What is the scope of the source?
4. Who published the source?
5. How current is the source?

## What are the author's credentials?

Determine:

- ✓ The author's academic or institutional affiliation
- ✓ If the author has published other books or articles on the subject

Where to find this information:

- ✓ Available on the "about the author" page of most books
- ✓ Accompanies the author's name in journal articles
- ❖ Finding information about the author of a Web site can be difficult (see Evaluating Sources - Websites) and therefore you should be very careful about using Web sources if you can't locate any information about the author.

Why is this important?

- ✚ Knowing the author's credentials will help you determine if the source is credible

## What is the purpose of the source?

Determine:

- ✓ Why the source was written
- ✓ For whom the source is intended

Consider:

- ✓ Is the author an academic who is engaging in a particular scholarly conversation?
- ✓ Does the author cite other major works on or data about the topic, or is this a personal response to an issue or text?
- ✓ Does the author have some kind of financial stake in expressing a particular point of view?
- ✓ Does the author work for an organization with a known viewpoint on the issues discussed in the source?

Why is this important?

- ❖ It's important to make sure that you ask these questions so that you'll know whether a source is of limited use to you due to a bias or a particular perspective.

(see reverse side)



## What is the scope of the source?

Determine:

- ✓ What it covers (refer to the abstract / synopsis)
- ✓ The depth in which it covers it

Consider

- ❖ Does the source make an argument relevant to your topic?
- ❖ Does it respond to other arguments made by other scholars?
- ❖ Does it lay out background information relevant to your topic?
- ❖ Does it summarize other research on your topic?

Why is this important?

- ✚ It will help you conduct efficient and effective research

## Who published the source?

Determine:

- ✓ The publisher (located on the title page or copyright page)

Consider:

- ❖ Is the publication a peer-reviewed journal?
- ❖ Is it published by an organization with a known viewpoint or financial stake in an issue?
- ❖ Is it published by an objective publisher?

Why is this important?

- ✚ Sources published by organizations with political affiliations, financial interests, etc. could potentially present biased information

## How current is the source?

Determine:

- ✓ Date of publication (located on title page or the copyright page)

Why is this important?

- ✚ You should always use the most up-to-date information available to ensure accuracy and validity
- ✚ Currency is more important in some fields than in other fields. It is very important in the social sciences and the natural sciences.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[www.ccms.edu](http://www.ccms.edu) > Student Resources >> Research & Writing

Adapted from "Questions to Ask About All Sources" by the Harvard College Writing Program  
<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page346373>