

P.R.O.V.E.N. Source Evaluation Process



I found this source for my paper. Do you think I should use it?

Have you **P.R.O.V.E.N.** that this source is a good choice?

What Determines Credibility?

The credibility of a source depends on how and why it was created, its creator's expertise and objectivity, the accuracy and completeness of the information presented, whether the information is current, and how the source will be used.

Some sources may be very credible but still inappropriate choices for a research assignment, depending on the requirements of the assignment.

Other sources, such as "[fake news](#)" and other dis/misinformation are never credible, no matter how convincing they are.

Evaluating Sources

The process of evaluating a source -- especially an internet source -- includes **both**:

- fact-checking by examining *other* sources such as internet fact-checking tools; and
- analyzing the source itself by examining its purpose, relevance, objectivity, verifiability, expertise, and newness.

The following strategies* will help you use other sources and tools to fact-check a source:

Check for previous work.

- Has someone already fact-checked this source? Try fact-checker sites like [Politifact](#), [Factcheck.org](#), [Snopes](#), [Lie Detector](#).

Find the original source.

- Who originally published the information and why? Find the original source of the information before evaluating it.

Read laterally.

- What do *other* sources say about this publication and author? What a source says about itself may not be trustworthy.

Circle back.

- How can you revise your search to yield better results? Use what you've learned to start over with new search terms.

Check your own emotions.

- We are more likely to believe something that stirs strong emotions. Be aware of your own biases as you fact-check.

*These strategies come from Mike Caulfield's free online book, [Web Literacy For Student Fact-Checkers](#) (2017), which provides detailed fact-checking instructions, including how to: determine the reputation of a scientific journal; figure out the original source of viral content; figure out who paid for a website; see if a tweet was sent by an imposter; find web pages that have been deleted; verify quotes from printed books; and more.

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The following questions will help you think critically as you examine a particular source:

Purpose: How and why the source was created.

- Why does this information exist—to educate, inform, persuade, sell, entertain? Do the authors, publishers, or sponsors state this purpose, or try to disguise it? Is the source deliberately trying to misinform?
- Why was this information published in this particular type of source (book, article, website, blog, etc.)?
- Who is the intended audience—the general public, students, experts?

Relevance: The value of the source for your needs.

- Is the type of source appropriate for how you plan to use it and for your assignment's requirements?
- How useful is the information in this source, compared to other sources? Does it answer your question or support your argument? Does it add something new and important to your knowledge of the topic?
- How detailed is the information? Is it too general or too specific? Is it too basic or too advanced?

Objectivity: The reasonableness and completeness of the information.

- Do the authors present the information thoroughly and professionally? Do they use strong, emotional, manipulative, or offensive language?
- Do the authors, publishers, or sponsors have a particular political, ideological, cultural, or religious point of view? Do they acknowledge this point of view, or try to disguise it?
- Does the source present fact or opinion? Is it biased? Does it offer multiple points of view and critique other perspectives respectfully? Does it leave out, or make fun of, important facts or perspectives?

Verifiability: The accuracy and truthfulness of the information.

- Do the authors support their information with factual evidence? Do they cite or link to other sources? Can you verify the credibility of those sources? Can you find the original source of the information?
- What do experts say about the topic? Can you verify the information in other credible sources?
- Does the source contradict itself, include false statements, or misrepresent other sources?
- Are there errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar?

Expertise: The authority of the authors and the source.

- What makes the authors, publishers, or sponsors of the source authorities on the topic? Do they have related education, or personal or professional experience? Are they affiliated with an educational institution or respected organization? Is their expertise acknowledged by other authorities on the topic? Do they provide an important alternative perspective? Do other sources cite this source?
- Has the source been reviewed by an editor or through peer review?
- Does the source provide contact information for the authors, publishers, and/or sponsors?

Newness: The age of the information.

- Is your topic in an area that requires current information (such as science, technology, or current events), or could information found in older sources still be useful and valid?
- When was the information in the source first published or posted? Are the references/links up to date?
- Are newer sources available that would add important information to your understanding of the topic?

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