When conducting research for a paper, it is important to evaluate each source for **relevance** and **reliability** to ensure that the facts and arguments you use in your paper are well-supported. You might also refer to our **Types of Sources** handout for a breakdown of the kinds of sources writers use.

RELEVANCE

The first step in evaluating a source is to determine if that source supports your purpose for writing. You might use sources to help answer your research questions, provide background information, establish a claim, or introduce an opposing viewpoint. Once you have established that a source is useful and relevant to your paper, then you can evaluate the source for reliability.

RELIABILITY

The three criteria below can help you identify if your source is reliable, or valid, for your paper's purpose:

Authority

If the **author** of a source is credible, using their work to support your ideas gives your paper credibility. A researcher or reporter may have different qualifications and perspectives to offer, but it is important to assess whether the author has the expertise required to accurately write about a topic. For example, if you are researching the effectiveness of probiotics, an article written by a microbiologist with 20 years of experience is more reliable than an article written by a reporter who usually covers the stock market.

Purpose

The author's **purpose** for publishing or producing a source will influence the accuracy and validity of the information in it. For instance, scientists circulate new discoveries in research journals, and news outlets publish stories to keep people informed of current events. In contrast, a dietary supplement company may hire researchers to independently publish a paper that supports the benefits of their supplements in order to influence consumers. Such a source is less reliable than the first two. Evaluating the author's purpose in creating a source helps you avoid sources by authors with extreme bias or hidden agendas.

Accuracy

Including **accurate** and current information in your paper gives your paper credibility. To determine a source's accuracy, examine what type(s) of evidence they use and where they found it. You might do a bit of research to see if other reliable sources are presenting the same information. The type of source can also give you a general idea about the accuracy of the information it contains. Academic journals are peer-reviewed and newspapers fact-check their information before publishing, so those sources might be more accurate than a personal blog.

The activity below will help you effectively evaluate whether your source is relevant to your paper and assess the authority, purpose, and accuracy of a source.

Is the information relevant to your work?

Does the source add to your project? Does the source support, oppose, or inform a main point in your research?

◄──►
strong no   maybe no   maybe yes   strong yes

What question(s) will the source help you answer?

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_____

What claim(s) will the source help you establish?

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_____

How can you use this source in your paper? (Perhaps as an answer to your research question, background information, supporting evidence, or opposing viewpoint(s)?)

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Is the information reliable?

Is the author/creator/organization reliable? Is the source material reliable?

◄──►
strong no   maybe no   maybe yes   strong yes

What are the author/creator/organization's credentials?

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What is the author/creator/organization's purpose for publishing this source? Is the purpose obvious or do they try to hide it?

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What evidence does the author/creator/organization use to support their claims? Can you verify this information in another source?

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