

INVESTIGATING SOURCES

Use this handout to examine sources critically as you research

CURRENCY: Is this information *current enough* to be relevant to my topic?

- Can you **determine the date** the document was written or published?
- Is the information **too dated**?
- If you're looking at website:
 - Is there an original publication date?
 - Is there a date indicating most recent revision or update?
 - Does it keep up-to-date with current information?
 - Are links on the site updated?

REPUTATION: Is this a *trustworthy source*?

- Faced with an **unfamiliar source**, use the library search, Wikipedia, or Google to find out **what kind of reputation** the source has. Can you determine the author's **credentials** and/or **affiliation**?
- If that search doesn't yield results, or you are dealing with a website, check:
 - Can you determine **who wrote it**?
 - Is there an author or corporate author? Is the page signed?
 - Is the author **qualified**? Have you heard of him/her before?
 - Are the sources well documented? Is there a bibliography?
 - Is there any evidence that the document is forged or altered?
 - Can you view relevant **Metadata** (for example, where and when **a picture was taken**)?

OBJECTIVITY/SPONSORSHIP: Is this source *biased*?

- Are there **inappropriate or unexcepted** value claims or appeals?
- Is this information **slanted**?
- Who is **sponsoring** or "backing" the information? Are organization name, logo, and authors visible?
- Is the purpose of the site **clearly stated**?
- Does there seem to be a **bias** or "vested interest" in the topic?
- **Why do you think** the author published this information?
 - To argue a position?
 - To sway others to a particular point of view?
 - To explain or to report events?
 - To inform and give facts and data?

CONTENT/ACCURACY: Is the evidence *accurate, useful, and relevant* to the intended audience?

- Is **factual information** verifiable? Are **original sources** of data stated?
- Is there a **disclaimer** describing the site's **limitations**?
- Are **selection criteria** included?
- Is the topic covered with **balance** to all aspects?
- Does material presented **correspond** to material you've gathered from other sources?
- Are the **comparisons between comparable things**?
- Has any significant information been **omitted**?