



Make it Matter

## Assessing the Reliability of a Source

### First: Your Own Lens

*We all process new information through a specific lens: The lens of our current beliefs about the world. That often makes it easier to reject information that contradicts your current understanding of the world. This isn't a bad thing! Every single person does this. Your job is just to be aware of your lens and attempt to correct for it as you evaluate the source.*

**Before evaluating the reliability of this source, to what degree do you already believe the claims that are made here?**

*(1 - I disagree strongly, 2 - I disagree, 3 - I have no opinion, 4 - I agree, 5 - I agree strongly)*

**Imagine that this source is reliable and accurate. Does that feel emotionally comfortable, uncomfortable, frightening, or exciting?**

**Imagine that this source is unreliable and inaccurate. Does *that* feel emotionally comfortable, uncomfortable, frightening, or exciting?**

**Considering your answers above, are you coming into this exercise with a bias towards this source being reliable or unreliable?**

*(1 - strong bias towards unreliable, 2 - slight bias towards unreliable, 3 - no bias, 4 - slight bias towards reliable, 5 - strong bias towards reliable)*

## Timeliness

*How “up to date” the information is. More recent information is more likely to be up to date. Information becomes out of date when new discoveries contradict or correct old information.*

**When was the information published or last revised?**

**Considering the field of study. Is it likely that new information has become available since this work?**

## Objectivity

*How neutral and unbiased the information provided is (all sources are somewhat biased).. Also, presenting a balanced point of view does not mean agreeing with all points of view. It simply means acknowledging and entering good-faith dialog with other points of view.*

**Is the author expressing an opinion or personal viewpoint? Why or why not?**

*Signs that they are expressing an opinion: They make claims without data to back them up. They use phrases like “In my opinion” or “I believe.” After sharing data they provide interpretations of that data that are only partially supported by the data.*

**Is there evidence that the author is trying to sway opinion?**

*Signs that they are trying to sway opinion: They make personal attacks against people who disagree with them or suggest they are stupid, insensitive, or unkind. They do not acknowledge or address data or arguments that contradict them.*

**Why was this source produced and/or funded? Who is the intended audience?**

*To sell, persuade, inform or entertain? Would this reason encourage the author to emphasize one point of view over others?*

## Authority

*The degree to which the producers of the information are qualified to present that information.*

**Who is the author and what are their qualifications?**

*Consider their area of education, past experience, previous publications*

**Is the author affiliated with a reliable and credible organization?**

**Is the information being published by a reliable and credible publisher?**

## Accuracy

*The degree to which information is factually correct. Authoritative, timely, objective work is likely to be accurate as well. Answer the following questions:*

**Does the author provide references to other sources that verify their claims?**

*(circle one)*

**YES**

**NO**

**Were you able to actually find those other sources?**

*(provide links and/or citations)*

**Using the 6 metrics listed on this worksheet, are the supporting sources high quality?**

*(do a rough first-pass score on the 6 metrics for the supporting sources)*

## Methodology

*Understanding how an author collects and analyzing information helps you understand if the data is missing important information or the analysis is coming to incorrect conclusions. You may need to discuss the methodology with an expert to understand what methods are best in this field.*

**Describe the way that the author gathered the information they used to form their conclusions.**

*Is the method clearly explained? Was it systematic or did they simply use whatever they happened to find? What choices did they make to ignore data or change data? Did they follow standard methods used by others in the field?*

**Describe the way that the author analyzed this information.**

*Consider the same details as in the previous question.*

**Does it make sense to you why the researchers made the methodology (meaning data and analysis) choices they did?**

**Is any underlying data they used available for review?**

## Provide an Overall Reliability Rating

Circle the rating (Low, Medium, or High) that you think is correct for each of the rows and then think about overall reliability.

	<b>1 - Low</b>	<b>2 - Medium</b>	<b>3 - High</b>
<b>Timeliness</b>	Source is very old and extremely likely to have been replaced by newer information	Source is somewhat old, but it is not clear there is newer information	Source is recent or we are confident there is no newer information
<b>Objectivity</b>	The author has a clear and strong bias and has not made an attempt to present a balanced point of view.	The author is somewhat biased, but has made an attempt to present a balanced point of view.	The author is largely unbiased, the intent of the publication is to provide unbiased information, and the author has worked hard to present a balanced point of view.
<b>Authority</b>	Neither the author nor publisher has official nor demonstrated authority	The author or publisher shows some signs of authority or expertise.	The author and publisher are highly knowledgeable, consistently unbiased, and well respected.
<b>Accuracy</b>	Supporting sources not provided or could not be found	Supporting sources found that directly support the claims, but of mediocre reliability	Many supporting sources of high reliability found that directly support the claims made
<b>Methodology</b>	The methodology is not clearly explained and/or the author made many decisions that do not make sense or would introduce bias.	The methodology is explained, but not in enough detail to be certain of its quality OR The methodology is unusual but does not introduce obvious errors or bias.	The methodology is clearly explained, follows standards in this field, and the author's decisions make sense to me.