Evaluating a Source

Directions: Use this graphic organizer when researching to help you determine how a source can be used. It’s important to recognize that the idea of one perfect source is often a myth – even a source that tries to be politically neutral is biased towards the status quo. Instead, consider how the scope, bias, and other elements of a given source can be understood in order to use the source appropriately, with your own critical thinking skills.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Element to Evaluate** | **Evaluation – overall, how well does your source do in each category?** | **Usefulness - how can this source be used, based on evaluation?** |
| **Relevance to Your Purpose**  · Does this resource focus on the topic you are researching?  · Does it provide new information and/or perspectives?  · Does it help you to answer your guiding research questions?  · What perspectives or ideas are missing from its scope? |  |  |
| **Credibility and Accuracy**  · Find the author/organization for the page and see what comes up if you Google them. Are they an expert? What strong biases do they have?  · Are there references, sources, and/or data given to back up claims? Where does this evidence come from?  · Are there many surprising, improbable things said? Can you check these with another course?  · Look around the website a bit – do you see any outrageous claims or conspiracy theories? |  |  |
| **Bias/Objectivity**  · Is the author trying to express their opinion as fact? Are they attempting to change your views?  · Look for loaded, emotional language intended to make you see something as positive or negative. Note when and how it is used.  · Critically examine the data given. Does it give a complete picture or is it cherry-picked to fit a specific claim? Do you need to look elsewhere to confirm that?  · Is there a political bias at play with the author or website? Do they lean left/liberal, right/conservative, center/status quo? |  |  |
| **Scope and Depth**  · Does the source given a complete and complex scope of the topic or does it assume you have background knowledge that you don’t?  · Does the source go in depth with its analysis of the topic, or does it focus just on a superficial overview of the facts? |  |  |

Tips for types of websites:

§ **Government agency: federal, state, city, county (address frequently includes .gov)**

Governmental sites have "official" information. For example, the text of the [***Code of Federal Regulations***](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionCfr.action?collectionCode=CFR) or a bill or resolution is a [**primary**](https://libguides.colostate.edu/howtodo/primarysources) [**source**](https://lib2.colostate.edu/howto/primsour.html) and is therefore a valuable resource.

§ **Educational: University, college, high school (address frequently includes .edu)**

Educational sites give "official" representation for organizations that offer education. Courses, syllabi, faculty and staff, admissions information, libraries, etc. are detailed online for current and prospective students and parents. In addition, many educational sites have pages that highlight the faculty's research. Departmental pages (including the library) frequently have links to sites by subject--a good way to find pages recommended by someone who has expertise in the field. Educational sites may include pages created by students for personal enjoyment.

§ **Business/Company (address frequently includes .com)**

These sites are created to promote a company's goods and services; at an increasing number of sites these can be purchased online. Some companies have links to their annual reports. It is extremely unlikely that an official site will include negative information about that company.

§ **News bureau: television, newspaper, radio (address frequently includes .com)**

News sites promote the network (shows), station (often the local news), or print publication. An increasing number of publications are available online only. Currency is very important. Sites online help researchers access news locally and from abroad.

§ **Personal/Individual (address frequently includes .com or .net)**

These pages are created for the enjoyment of the creator and his/her family and friends. There are instances where a personal interest page will have information or links to information that is scholarly or otherwise highly credible, but remember, "any idiot can create a Web site--and has" so you must be careful when accessing these pages.

*Some text on this graphic organizer taken from* [*https://libguides.colostate.edu/howtodo/evaluatewebpage*](https://libguides.colostate.edu/howtodo/evaluatewebpage) *and* [*https://library.fiu.edu/c.php?g=159967&p=1049237*](https://library.fiu.edu/c.php?g=159967&p=1049237)