

# The 5Ws Method of Evaluating Sources

## **WHO: Who is the author?**

- Identify any credentials the author has that make him/her an authority?
- If an individual author is not named who is the editor or sponsor?
- If the source is a web site, is there a link to a "home page" to see who is sponsoring the page?
- Can you detect any conflict of interest or potential bias in this author?

## **WHAT: What type of document is it?**

- Is it a primary or secondary document?
- Is it an:
  - Opinion, news article, review, report, research study, popular article, scholarly article, blog post, peer-reviewed article, statistical analysis, corporate document, government document

## **WHEN: When was the information published and/or updated?**

- What is the date of publication?
- When did the event or research being discussed in the document occur?
- Is your topic time-sensitive so that you can only use the most updated information or is your topic more historically oriented?

## **WHERE: Where was the information published?**

- Is it published in a scholarly journal, popular magazine, encyclopedia, book, website.
- Is the publisher a known and respected source in the discipline?
- If the source is a web site, you can check the domain name for clues (.edu, .org, .com, .mil, .net) to determine what type of page this might be.
  - Is there an "about" or "what is" link from either the information page or the "home page" that outlines the purpose of the pages? Are they trying to sell something?

## **WHY: Why was the document created?**

- Who is the intended audience?
  - General audience
  - Specific audience
  - Educated audience
- What is the author's purpose toward this intended audience--to inform, to persuade, to entertain, to share a point of view? What is the author's desired effect upon this audience?
- Does this purpose seem honest and trustworthy?
- Was the author paid for his opinion by a third-party that may be considered biased?

## **HOW: How was it written? How was it produced?**

- How did the author gather data to prepare the artifact? Did the author:
  - gather data or information from outside sources;
  - incorporate in-text citations and a list of references;
  - present supporting pieces of data, sources, citations, quotes, personal experience, a reliable methodology.
  - If there's not an actual "works cited," are there any internal references to other sources?
    - If yes, what kind of sources are they? Do these sources supplement the information given?
    - If links are provided, do the links work?

