

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?
- Does the type of document indicate HOW it was made and effect its reliability?

WHEN: When was the document 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?
- When in the [Information Cycle](#) was this publication published?

WHERE: Where was the document published?

- Is it published in a scholarly journal, newspaper, popular magazine, encyclopedia, book, website, corporate or commercial site?
- Is the publisher a known and respected source of information?
- 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?
- Does WHO wrote the information and WHERE it was published indicate purpose?

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 credible outside sources;
 - incorporate in-text citations and a list of references or works cited;
 - 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 credible sources? Do these sources supplement the information given? Do the links work?
- Did the production of this information go through a vetting, editing, or peer review process?

