



# Evaluating Online Information Sources

These are questions to ask yourself when you are deciding which online research resources you are going to use.



## *When you encounter any source of information*

- **Authority** - Who is the author? What is their point of view?
- **Purpose** - Why was the source created? Who is the intended audience?
- **Publication & Format** - Where was it published? In what medium?
- **Relevance** - How is it relevant to your research? What is its scope?
- **Date of Publication** - When was it written? Has it been updated?
- **Publication & Format** - Where was it published? In what medium?

## *Authority*

- Who is the author?
- What else has the author written?
- In which communities and contexts does the author have expertise?
  - Does the author represent a particular set of world views?
  - Do they represent specific gender, sexual, racial, political, social and/or cultural orientations?
  - Do they privilege some sources of authority over others?
  - Do they have a formal role in a particular institution (e.g. a professor at Oxford?)

## *Purpose*

- Why was the source created?
  - Does it have economic value for the author or publisher?
  - Is it an educational resource? Persuasive?
    - ~ What (research) questions does it attempt to answer?

- Who is the intended audience?
  - Is it for scholars?
  - Is it for a general audience?

## *Publication & Format*

- Where was it published?
- Was it published in a scholarly publication, such as an academic journal?
  - Who was the publisher? Was it a university press?
  - Was it formally peer-reviewed?
- Does the publication have a particular editorial position?
  - Is it generally thought to be a conservative or progressive outlet?
  - Is the publication sponsored by any other companies or organizations?
  - Do the sponsors have particular biases?
- Were there any apparent barriers to publication?
  - Was it self-published?
  - Were there outside editors or reviewers?
- Where, geographically, was it originally published, and in what language?
- In what medium?
  - Was it published online or in print? Both?
  - Is it a blog post? A YouTube video? A TV episode? An article from a print magazine?
  - ~What does the medium tell you about the intended audience?

## *Relevance*

- How is it relevant to your research?
  - Does it analyze the primary sources that you are researching?
  - Does it cover the authors or individuals that you're researching, but different primary texts?
  - Can you apply the authors' frameworks of analysis to your own research?
- What is the scope of coverage?
  - Is it a general overview or an in-depth analysis?
  - Does the scope match your own information needs?
  - Is the time period and geographic region relevant to your research?

