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**Assessing the Credibility of Research Sources**



Evaluating the credibility and validity of a resource can be very difficult, particularly when doing research using the Internet. Below are some basic guidelines to help you select reliable resources and use those to learn accurate information about a given subject.

**Characteristics of Reliable Sources**

**Authority**:

* Is the author an expert or authority in the field?

**Accuracy**:

* Are sources for the factual content on the site clear?
* Is it possible to verify the accuracy of the information being presented?

**Timeliness**:

* Is the source up-to-date enough for your subject? Depending on the nature of your topic, some sources may not be relevant anymore:
  + Scientific developments - 5 years maximum
  + Current social debates or controversies - 10-12 years maximum
* Always cite the most recent reliable source that you have available

**Objectivity**: *(Note: depending on the task, you may actually need to gather non-objective viewpoints)*

* Is the author biased? If so, what is the author's bias?
* How do the author's ideas relate to those in other sources?
* Are all claims backed up with verifiable evidence?
* What does the author emphasize or ignore? Even a biased work should present sound reasoning and adequate evidence. Opposing views should be addressed with calm logic.

**Assessing Online Sources**

**What type of site are you viewing?**  The authors of many websites have goals and biases that

* **Scholarly focus**: .*edu, .org,* and *.gov* sites tend to be the most reliable.
* **Informational focus**: .*edu, .org, .gov,* and some .*com* sites provide solid information.
* **Advocacy focus**: .*org* or .*com* sites may be reliable, but may distort evidence. Knowing their bias allows you to use them wisely.
* **Commercial focus**: .*com* sites further the sponsor’s profit-making purpose, but they can also include reliable data.
* Anonymous authors or authors with unidentifiable credentials: chat rooms, personal web pages, blogs, bulletin boards are not good sources for research.

**Other Tips For Success**

Once you have gathered all your information, put all ideas in **your own words**.

**Keep track** of all your sources, and make sure to **cite them** appropriately! You will always be asked for a reference list, but your teacher may also require you to identify your sources in the body of your work.