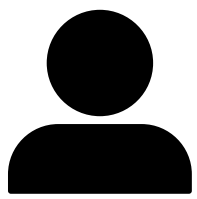


Evaluating Popular Sources

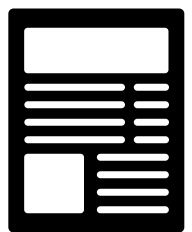
Step 1: The 5 W's

There are times when you need to look outside of scholarly sources for a research project. It's important to think critically when determining if/when popular sources are credible for academic research. Begin with asking the 5W's.



Who?

- Who is the author?
- What are their credentials for the topic?
- What is the author's affiliation?
- If an organization authored the document, are they an academic institution or a business?



What?

- What is it about?
- Is it accurate?
- What type of source is it?
- Is it primary or secondary?
- Is the source appropriate for your assignment?



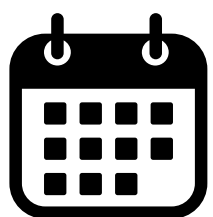
Where?

- Where is the source published?
- Is the publisher/website/platform reputable?
- Is it a blog or national news website?



Why?

- Why was it published?
 - To inform, entertain, persuade, or sell?
- Does it represent an agenda?
 - Whose? How are they benefiting from this information being published?



When?

- When was it published?
- If it's older, is that appropriate for your research?
- Is your research dependent on the most current information?

Evaluating Popular Sources

Step 2: Lateral Reading

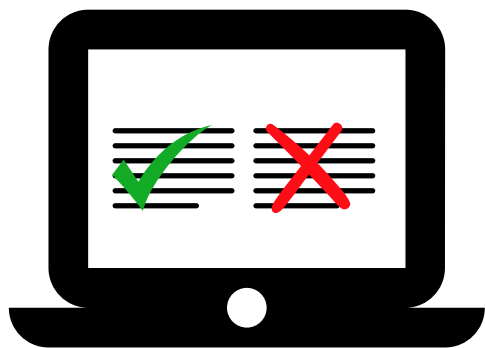
Lateral reading means to read around and about your source in other locations. With scholarly articles, much of the detective work is done before publication, but when using popular sources, you have to do the detective work (critical thinking) yourself.



1

Cross reference the facts in your source.

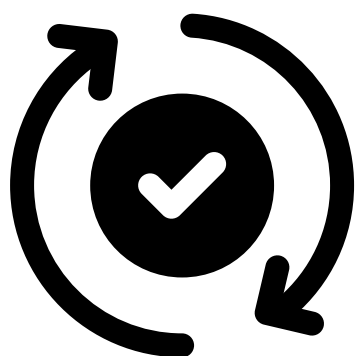
- Follow the embedded links and any references listed in the article to verify information.
- Search for additional articles on the topic from a wide variety of sources and points of view.
- If unfamiliar with the source, search for information on the author or the organization that published the article.



2

Circle back to source.

- Evaluate again and put into context after reading laterally.
- Did you read contradicting information?
- Does the source hold up after scrutiny?



3

Research is iterative. It's okay to begin again.

- Sometimes a source is unreliable for academic research or just a poor source overall.
- Other times the source isn't bad, but isn't appropriate for your specific research project.
- It's up to you to ensure your sources are reliable and appropriate for your research project.



If you want to practice evaluating sources, check out the [“Identifying & Evaluating Information Sources”](https://www.library.tamu.edu/research-process/identifying-and-evaluating-information-sources/) module on the Library Tutorials website: [tx.ag/ResearchProcess](https://www.library.tamu.edu/research-process/)