

Evaluating the Source and the Author's Credentials

“Where do you usually find information? How do you decide if it’s trustworthy?”

1. Introduction

In today's world, we are surrounded by information—from books, social media, news articles, and blogs. But not all information is accurate or reliable. As critical readers, we must learn to **evaluate both the source** (where the information comes from) **and the author** (who wrote it).

2. Understanding the Source

The **source** is the publication or platform that shares information. The type of source often gives clues about its **accuracy, purpose, and depth**.

Example:

You are researching *sleepwalking*. You find:

1. An encyclopedia entry – gives only a short overview.
2. A *Woman's Day* magazine article – includes personal stories and entertainment.
3. A *Psychological Review* journal article – presents detailed scientific research.

Which one is the most factual and reliable?

→ The **research journal**, because it is written by experts and reviewed before publication.

Ask These Questions When Evaluating a Source

1. What **reputation (type)** does the source have? (academic, commercial, popular)
2. Who is the **intended audience?** (scholars, general readers, customers)
3. Does it provide **references or documentation?**
4. Is the **information current** and supported by evidence?

3. Evaluating the Author's Credentials

Even a good source can include weak authorship. Always ask: **Who wrote this? Are they qualified to speak on the topic?**

Author Credentials Include:

- **Education** or academic degrees related to the topic
- **Professional experience** or job background
- **Institutional affiliation** (university, organization, company)
- **Other publications** in the same field
- **Contact or biographical information**

This information is usually found in:

Title page, preface, or back cover

Author bio on book jacket or publisher's website

If no information about the author is provided, question the reliability of the content.

4. Evaluating Online Sources

The internet includes both valuable research and misleading content. Always investigate before accepting online information as true.

The CRAAP Test for Quick Source Evaluation

Use these five questions to test the quality of any source or website:

Letter	Question	What It Means
C – Currency	When was it published or last updated? Old data may be outdated.	
R – Relevance	Does it fit your topic or purpose?	Avoid unrelated or superficial texts.
A – Authority	Who wrote or published it?	Experts or institutions are more trustworthy.
A – Accuracy	Is it supported by facts or citations?	Check for references and evidence.
P – Purpose	Why was it created?	To inform, persuade, sell, or entertain.

Be cautious if:

- No author is named
- Opinions are presented as facts
- The content has spelling or factual errors
- Links are broken or outdated

Conclusion

- A **credible source** is recent, relevant, accurate, and written by a qualified author.
- Always check both the **publication** (source) and the **writer** (author credentials).
- Online sources require extra caution — verify the **sponsor, accuracy, and update date**.
- Ask critical questions: Who wrote this? Why was it written? Can I verify it?

Practice Exercises

Exercise 1 – Read the following and complete the chart.

Text A:

“Dr. Lina Hassan, professor of environmental science at the University of Algiers, reports that air pollution levels have doubled since 2010 based on new satellite data.”

Text B:

“I think pollution is getting worse every year. People just don’t care! I see it every day in my city.”

Criteria	Text A	Text B
Author credentials		
Source type		
Evidence provided		
Bias or opinion		
Overall credibility		

Which text is more trustworthy? Why?

Exercise 2 – For each situation, discuss whether the source is appropriate and reliable. (Which would you use? Why or why not?)

1. Using an article from *Working Mother* magazine on family conflict for a sociology paper.

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2. Quoting *The New York Times* for a speech on innovation in China.

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3. Reading a research paper from *Educational Research Quarterly* for a project on bilingual education.

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4. Using a *TV Guide* article on crime for a paper on media effects.

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5. Referring to a book by former First Lady Laura Bush for a discussion on presidential power.

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Exercise 3 – Analyze the following websites using the checklist below.

Criteria	First website	Second website
Website name and URL	
Sponsor or publisher		
Author and credentials		

Criteria	First website	Second website
Date of publication or update		
Purpose (inform / persuade / sell)		
Evidence or references		
Are links current and reliable?		
Overall reliability (High / Medium / Low)		

Exercise 4 – Read the following bios and decide who is more credible for a paper on mental health:

Author 1: Sara Brown is a freelance journalist who writes lifestyle articles for *Healthy Life Magazine*.

Author 2: Dr. Ahmed Karim is a licensed psychologist and university lecturer with 15 years of clinical experience.

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Exercise 5 – What did you learn today about identifying trustworthy sources? And how can these skills help you in your studies or daily reading?

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References

McWhorter, K. T. (2016). In Concert: Reading and Writing (2nd ed.). Pearson