Evaluating Sources for a Research Paper

1. **Author**  Is the author an authority? Is he or she an expert? Does the book, article, or site offer any background information about the author? Does the background of the author suggest what his or her position would be? For example, don’t expect a butcher to give accurate information on why people should become vegetarians.

2. **Publisher**  If the sources is published or maintained by a university, the content is likely to be scholarly.

3. **Title**  The full title of a book or article usually indicates its content and purpose. It can also tell you if the publication is scholarly or popular.

4. **Date of Publication**  When was the source published? Or, in the case of a web site, when was it last updated? On web pages, the date of the last revision is usually at the bottom of the home page. Is your source current? Current sources are especially important when your topic is related to the sciences.

5. **Preface**  Many readers automatically skip over introductory material, but an author’s preface may be a valuable overview of the content and purpose of the source.

6. **Table of Contents**  The chapter titles indicate the major topics covered in a book or periodical.

7. **Abstract**  Many scholarly journals preface each article with a brief summary of its content. In some books, an abstract precedes each chapter.

8. **Illustrations**  Paging through a book will show you whether there are maps, diagrams, or other graphic materials that might be useful. Sometimes there is a list of illustrations in the front of a book.

9. **Documentation**  An author’s notes and bibliography are an indication, but not proof, of reliability. Furthermore, the bibliography and notes may direct you to other sources.

10. **Index**  The alphabetical listing of topics covered in a book is no proof of reliability, but it can help you determine whether or not a book will be useful.