Evaluate Your Sources

In this video, you will learn how to:
- recognize the elements that signal academic authority in a publication, such as author's qualifications, publisher, references, and peer review, and
- assess whether your sources' date of publication reflects the needs of your research topic

How do you know whether your research has turned up sources that are "authoritative"? That is to say: credible, objective, and trustworthy. What makes a given publication "authoritative," in the academic context?

You can evaluate whether a source is academically reliable by focusing your attention on the following features that signal academic authority in a source.

Author's Qualifications
Are they affiliated with a university or research institution? Do they hold a PhD in a relevant discipline? Do they have other relevant publications? Is their work cited by other scholars? You can check who is citing their work in Scopus or Google Scholar.

Publisher
Is the publisher a university press or a research institution? Is it a professional association or a government organization? Professional associations, for instance, often produce trade publications intended for working professionals, such as *Monitor on Psychology, Accounting Today, or Energy Manager.* Unlike trade publications, university presses and research institutions adhere to higher peer-review standards. We will come back to peer review in a moment.

References
Does the source include any references and/or citations? Credible research publications list their sources. By building upon other scholars' ideas and by making this process explicit through a trail of citations, academics establish credibility and authority. What do the references tell you about the breadth and currency of topic coverage by the author? What biases and perspectives do they reveal?

Peer Review
Unlike magazines, or trade publications, scholarly publications undergo a rigorous peer-review process. Peer-review is a process of pre-approval or review of one's work by professional peers intended to uphold academic standards within a given discipline. Essential to the peer review process are referees. These are existing experts in a given field called upon to evaluate potential publications or conference proposals. Referees assess the quality of the writing and research and may suggest changes to the original work before it is deemed fit for publication or presentation. Hence, peer review is an essential part of assessing whether one's sources of information are authoritative, that is, credible, objective, and trustworthy.

Date of Publication

Do you require the latest information, or a classic or standard text? If the subject of your research topic is quickly evolving, you may require the most recent information. If your topic requires an overview or historiography of the disciple, you may need older as well as recent materials. Recognize the time needs of your topic and seek sources that reflect these needs.

We can summarize the general differences between scholarly and popular sources based on several criteria: purpose, audience, author's qualifications, tone, validation, and layout.

Criteria	Scholarly publications: Journals, Books, Conference Proceedings	Non-scholarly publications: Magazines, Newspapers, and Websites
Purpose	report independent research findings	provide information at a profit: sell ads
Audience	academics and researchers	general public and professionals
Author's Qualifications	PhD, employed by a university	wide range possible
Tone	formal, scientific, technical	informal
Validation	references and/or citations	references rarely required
Layout	often mostly text, lengthy	shorter, many illustrations
Examples	*Journal of Memory and Language, Journal of American History*	*Psychology Today*, *Maclean's*, Wikipedia

In this video, you have learned how to:
● recognize the elements that signal academic authority in a publication, such as author's qualifications, publisher, references, and peer review, and
● assess whether your sources' date of publication reflects the needs of your research topic