

# SOURCE EVALUATION RUBRIC

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

	0	1	2	3
<b>S</b> ubstance Score ____	No depth or written for children.	Lacking the depth needed for your purpose.	Written for the general public.	Depth of coverage needed for your purpose <i>and</i> written at a college or professional level.
<b>C</b> urrency Score ____	There is no publication date or copyright date.	The source is more than 5 years old and has no historical value.	The source is 3 to 5 years old <i>or</i> the source has some historical value.	The source is less than 3 years old and is a current source of its type on the topic, <i>or</i> it is a primary source.
<b>A</b> uthority Score ____	The author(s) and/or publisher are not named.	The author(s) are named, but credentials cannot be verified <i>or</i> credentials are unrelated to topic.	The author(s) are named and relevant credentials are verifiable, <i>or</i> the publisher is credible source on this topic.	Author's name & credentials are provided, can be verified, and demonstrate probable expertise on topic; <i>and</i> publisher is reputable.
<b>R</b> elevance Score ____	The source is unrelated to the research topic.	The source is related to the topic, but the information is not very useful.	The information is somewhat useful, possibly as overview or background.	The information is very useful.
<b>A</b> ccuracy Score ____	Content seems "off-the wall" <i>or</i> the source contains poor grammar or numerous spelling errors <i>or</i> no sources mentioned.	Source(s) of information are mentioned, but not formally cited. No bibliography or references included.	Formally cited (bibliography, references or footnotes) <i>or</i> source is industry-approved (such as a trade or professional journal).	Formally cited <i>and</i> from a peer-reviewed, academic or professional source <i>or</i> it is a primary source.
<b>B</b> ias Score ____	The source is entirely opinion-based and unfair.	The source is persuasive, but is not well-cited.	The source is persuasive, but is well-cited, and supports arguments well.	The source examines both sides of the issue fairly, and/or is primarily fact-based.
<b>TOTAL SCORE:</b> _____	<b>0 TO 6 PTS.</b> Highly questionable source.	<b>7 TO 10 PTS.</b> Useful for personal purposes, but not appropriate for college-level research.	<b>11 TO 14 PTS.</b> Possibly a good source for academic research, but better sources may be available.	<b>15 TO 18 PTS.</b> Excellent source for academic research.

Disclaimer: This rubric is intended to provide guidance in evaluating information sources and may not work for every source or information need. Some resources may be appropriate for your need, but may not score high in every category.

*When in doubt, ask your instructor or a Reference Librarian for assistance.*

**McHenry County College Library** 8/09

## Tips on Using the Rubric

There are a number of places to look for clues to help you use the source evaluation rubric.

Some of these clues lie within the text of the source itself:

- Substance
  - By reading or skimming the text, you can tell pretty quickly whether the source is geared to children, the general public, or professionals in a particular field.
- Relevance
  - Naturally, you should be able to tell from reading the source whether or not it will be useful for your purpose.
- Bias
  - It takes very careful reading of the text to discern possible bias and evaluate an argument. This takes practice! Also consider the purpose for which the source was written and whether the author or publisher has an agenda.

Other clues lie around or near the text:

- Authority
  - Evaluating the authority of a source involves looking for the author's name and information about the author from which you can judge the author's expertise on the subject.
  - Authority also involves checking out the publisher or organization that made the source available. If the source was found on the free web, there is often an "about us" section on the web site that gives information about it or you can shorten the web address to just after the .com, .org, etc. to get to the home page. Sources found in library subscription databases are often digital reprints of articles that were originally published in print. The publishers for such articles are the periodicals in which they originally appeared.
- Currency
  - The publication date, copyright date, or last update should appear near the beginning or end of the text.
- Accuracy
  - A bibliography or reference list at the end of the text can give you an idea of the extent of research done in preparation of the text. Keep in mind that primary sources do not usually include bibliographies.

Finally, you may have to go outside the source for clues to evaluating it:

- Try using a search engine to find out more about an author, or verify his or her credentials.
- What do other people have to say about the author, the publisher, their biases, etc.?
- What else has the author published? Has he or she written other articles/books in the same field?

Helpful Definitions from the *Online Dictionary of Library & Information Science*:

**Scholarly or Academic Journal:** A periodical devoted to disseminating original research and commentary on current developments within a specific field of study (*example: Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*). Journal articles are usually written by the person (or persons) who conducted the research. Most scholarly journals are **peer-reviewed**, meaning that prior to acceptance for publication, the articles are submitted to a process of critical evaluation by one or more experts on the subject.

**Trade Journal:** A periodical devoted to disseminating news and information of interest to a specific category of business or industry, often published by a trade association.

**Primary source:** In scholarship, a document or record containing firsthand information or original data on a topic, used in preparing a derivative work. Primary sources include original manuscripts, periodical articles reporting original research or thought, diaries, memoirs, letters, journals, photographs, drawings, posters, film footage, sheet music, songs, interviews, government documents, public records, eyewitness accounts, newspaper clippings, etc.

**Secondary source:** Any published or unpublished work that is one step removed from the original source, usually describing, summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, derived from, or based on primary source materials. Examples include reviews, critical analyses, second-person accounts, biographies, historical studies, etc.

**Bias:** Judgment unfairly influenced by subjective opinion when the situation calls for reliance on objective fact.