Questions to Ask When Determining Credibility of Sources

When you write a paper, you may be asked to use peer-reviewed sources to support your ideas. In some cases, your instructor may allow you to use credible online sources of information. Since anyone can post content on the Internet, it's very important to understand that not everything you find online is from a credible source. Here are some questions to ask to determine if a source is credible:

Who – Look for information created by an identifiable author or organization.
- Is there an author name?
- Are any credentials or background information available on the author – can you tell if the author is qualified to write about this topic?

Credible sources will have an identifiable author (either an individual, group, or organization). If the author's credentials are listed, that can help you determine if he or she is qualified to write about the topic. If their credentials aren't listed, you can do an Internet search to find more information about the author's qualifications.

What – What information is presented and in what context?
- Are there unbelievable or emotional claims?
- Are facts backed up by sources? Look for additional links, references, footnotes, or citations that tell you where the author got his or her information.

Credible sources of information present arguments that are backed up by facts. Authors will make it clear where they found their information so that you can fact-check if you want.

Why – Think about why the information was created.
- Is the purpose of the site to inform, persuade, to sell or to entertain?
- Does the site have a lot of advertising? Are the advertisements labeled?
- If there is no advertising, who is funding the site? (Look at the url for clues).

Knowing why a source of information was created can help you determine if it is credible. An author who is trying to sell you something, for instance, might present biased information. Bias isn't necessarily bad - if a site doesn't present a balanced look at an issue, though, consult resources that represent other sides of it, too.

When – Look for publication dates if you need current information.
- Is there a date of publication or most recent update listed?

You might not need current information for your topic; if you do, though, check the dates of the information you are using to make sure it is up-to-date. If you can't find a date, look for clues like broken urls that might indicate a site hasn't been updated.

Credible sources make your paper's argument stronger.
Want more information? Check out this NAU Library tutorial on credible websites, or email askalibrarian@national.libanswers.com

IDENTIFYING CREDIBLE SOURCES

AVOID	WHERE TO FIND	EXAMPLES OF CREDIBLE SOURCES
- Wikipedia is a useful starting point, but do not use it as a reference; use the resources available through the library or credible websites, if allowed. - Question and Answers websites - Blogs, Facebook - Editorials, Opinion articles, and Letters to the Editor from any print or online newspaper - Content farms – low-cost articles designed to generate high web traffic, such as eHow and About.com	From the NAU Online Library or the Internet: - Trade journals or magazines from a specific industry - Newspapers - Magazines - Websites Use the questions on the previous page to help you determine the credibility of your sources. Also check the information you find in these sources. Compare several articles or websites on the same topic. Take a few specific facts from one article and confirm or disprove them with another credible source (Stebbins, 2015, pp. 22-23).	- Peer-reviewed and scholarly journal articles from the NAU Online Library - Congressional Research Service reports - Department of Defense websites (.mil) - Federal government websites (.gov) - State government websites (.state.us or .state.gov)

*Stebbins, L.F. (2015). *Finding Reliable Information Online.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.