



Evaluating Sources Classical Studies

How can you tell whether your sources are reliable, credible, and accurate? What is the difference between biased and unbiased sources?

Evaluating sources is an important part of any research process as it encourages you to think critically about the information you intend to use. Assessing the credibility and reliability of a source will allow you to make judgments about its trustworthiness and usefulness to your research.

Not all information is reliable or accurate, nor will all information be suitable for your research topic. Failing to scrutinize the reliability of historical sources exposes the danger of accepting erroneous or prejudiced information as fact, potentially resulting in misconceptions, inaccuracies, and the unwitting spread of misinformation.

By using the following strategy, you can better ensure that the sources you use in your research are reliable and support your arguments and ideas.

Who?

When evaluating the reliability of information, it is important to examine the credibility and trustworthiness of the author. This involves determining whether the author is a credible, reputable, and trustworthy source, such as a primary source, eyewitness, or academic expert. Evaluating the source's credibility requires investigating the author's credentials and reputation. Take into consideration the author's context when writing, their qualifications and expertise in the subject matter.

What?

What type of source is it? Is it a book, journal article, newspaper or magazine articles, website, podcast, blog, interview or television and radio documentaries? When using websites, examining the URL extension, '.gov', '.org', and '.edu' can tell you whether the source comes from a government agency, a non-profit organisation or educational institute. Primary sources are documents, images or artefacts that provide firsthand testimony or direct evidence such as, first-hand written accounts, diary entries, memoirs, letters, inscriptions, coins etc. Certain primary sources may be judged more reliable than others and may require further investigation into their contextual background.

Where?

Where has the source come from? Central to this is the author/creator of the source, for example a respected academic journal or reputable/well-known website. Geopolitical considerations could play an important role in the creation and publication of information.

WHO?

WHEN?

WHAT?

WHY?

WHERE?

HOW?

When?

When was the information, written, published, created, or released? Are these dates meaningful or important for the topic being researched? Is the author/creator able to accurately comment on events or people, at the time of writing/publishing? If using websites or internet-based sources, consider how frequently they are updated and whether the information provided is still accurate.

Why?

Why was the information written/created/published? Who is the intended audience? What are the motivations of the author to create, write or produce the information? What influences may have played a part in what has been written/created/produced? Examine whether the author is showing favouritism or prejudice for or against someone or something? If the content contains bias, only one point of view is being presented. Assess for bias by examining the purpose of an article, website etc. For example, is the author trying to promote a particular viewpoint? Compare the information to other reliable sources so that you can make an informed decision whether bias is at play.

How?

How accurate is the source? Evaluating sources requires a focus on accuracy and consistency. Verifying the information for accuracy, confirming the presence of evidence behind the information presented. Cross-referencing the information across various sources to identify any disparities, inconsistencies may signal inaccuracies or biases.

