

The ABCD's of Information Literacy

Author – Who or what person and/or organization is responsible for the content? What are the author's credentials or expertise in the area? Don't just list all of the information that you find on this person—focus on what makes the author credible (or not credible) to write this article.

- What are the author's credentials? Why is she or he qualified to write on this topic? Look at the article to see if author qualifications are given; if they are not, Google him/her. Explore a web page to determine if author information is available, sometimes you have to dig to locate author credentials.
- Try to determine if the author is well known in his/her field. What else has he or she written? Is the author cited frequently in other information sources?
- If the author is not an individual but rather an organization, what can you find out about the organization and its goals? This is especially important for web pages where the author/organization can easily remain obscure.

Bias – How objective is the information? Are there clearly stated biases? How might the author's affiliations indicate bias? **Bias is not the same thing as the argument that's being made in the text.** Bias means a predisposition or outside factor that could potentially influence an argument or the information that is presented.

- Even in scholarly journals, research may be funded by interested parties. Funding is something to consider as you think about the objectivity of an information source.
- Is any advertising clearly differentiated from the informational content? Is it difficult to determine where informational content ends and advertising content begins?
- Benefits, who might benefit or who might lose from the informational content?
- Is only one view expressed or is the information placed in context of more than one perspective? Are all views treated fairly, even as they are being contested?
- Just because an information source is biased does not necessarily mean that it's incorrect, but understanding a source's bias will help you to better determine if the information matches your need.

Again, just because an information source is narrow in scope or reaches a conclusion does not mean that there is bias. For example, perhaps you read a scholarly article indicating that there is a high correlation between junk food consumption and obesity. If no conflict of interest is found after examining the article's funding information and the authors' place of employment, the article is simply communicating conclusions drawn from a balanced research study.

Content – What is the article saying? What's its main argument? What information does it present?

Date – What is the relevance of the date of publication to your research? Sometimes you will need information from a specific date range and sometimes you will just want to find the most current information about a topic possible.

- Can you determine date of publication if the information source is a book or an article? Will the date of publication work for your information need? For example, will a book published in 1954 reflect current group therapy practices? Of course not! But will it help you trace the evolution of group therapy practices? Yes!!!
- It can be more difficult to determine when a web page was published. You may need to look for a date of last update, copyright date, or see if links to other web pages still work or if blogs have been recently updated.

Medium/Source —Where was the article/information published? What type of publication is this? Is it a newspaper, magazine, or a scholarly journal? Who or what organization is the publisher?

- Always try to find the publication's mission statement because it will provide clues as to whether the source might have any bias. For example, *The Christian Observer* is known to be a highly conservative and often religious periodical. This helps you understand the potential bias that might shape the articles published in it. Similarly, *Sports Illustrated* is a sports magazine devoted to sports issues. This means that information on NFL concussions are likely going to focus on the sports aspect instead of providing a detailed scientific overview of the brain.