**6 Ways to Tell if a Web Site is Credible**

**What is a credible source?** Nowadays, anybody can be a published author. Researchers therefore can’t rely on the top five results of a Google search to properly inform them about an issue. That’s why you need to use credible sources—publications written by authors with actual expertise on the issue and/or first-hand experience of an event.

Just because a source is credible doesn’t automatically mean that you should agree with the author’s opinions, but it does mean that if you want to make a counter-argument, you need to find other, equally credible sources to argue against it.

1. **Author** –
   * Is the author’s name listed? The fact that the author is willing to stand behind the information presented is a minimum standard for credibility.
   * Google the author to find out more about this person. Does the author have any relevant qualifications that add credibility to her opinions? Has the author written about this topic before in other credible publications?
2. **Citation of Sources** – Credible websites should cite the sources of the information presented. Those sources should be credible as well. **Yes, you need to click on at least 2-3 of those links and see where they go.** Are the links broken? Do they lead to credible or non-credible publications? BIG RED FLAG: Does the author cite himself often?
3. **Domain** –
   * The domain .edu is reserved for colleges and universities, while .gov denotes a government website. These two are usually credible sources (remember, this doesn’t mean that you have to agree with them).
   * Some domains such as .com, .org, and .net can be purchased and used by anybody, anywhere. The owner of the site could range from the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* quoting a respected leader in her field to an uninformed nobody who gets a lot of clicks for being provocative.
   * The domain .org is used by non-profit organizations which may have an agenda of persuasion rather than education. There are many non-profits that use credible information to make their arguments; just be aware that they are often trying to persuade you that their side of the issue is the right one. Treat them like Wikipedia: A good place to start your research. Do not base your entire argument on a .org source.
4. **Bias --** This is sometimes tough to spot. Having a **bias** isn’t the same thing as **“fake news”** (reporting on events that never happened in a deliberate attempt to lie to readers). A bias is a perspective on an issue that stops the author from fully weighing the other side of an argument. Everybody has biases, but credible authors at least try to limit their biases by giving the other side a fair hearing.
   * One clear sign of bias is if the author doesn't acknowledge counter-arguments, or briefly mentions them in a dismissive way.
   * Does the author belong to an organization, political party or publication that has an agenda? **When in doubt, click on the home page of an organization or publication and try to find an "About Us" section.**
   * Look at other articles the site has published. Do they always criticize the same political party or promote the same arguments, or are a wide variety of opinions represented?
   * <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/> A quick way to screen out **fake news** and find out the **bias** of a publication.
5. **Writing Style** –Credible sites usually have professional editors. If the writing has no editors looking after its quality, this website probably doesn’t have any fact checkers either.
6. **Click Bait:** These are superficial stories that rely on causing a quick and powerful emotional reaction (usually anger or cheap thrills) in the reader to generate clicks for ads. They are easy to spot, because they often use provocative visuals and the same phrases. **Avoid them.** Examples: “17 secrets [xxxxx] don't want you to know”, “20 Signs You're actually a [xxxxx]” and “Top [xxxx] reasons/things why.” *Business Insider* is a good example of something that **sounds** like a credible source but is mostly click bait.

**When is it OK to use an unreliable source?** The kind of websites you use for research can depend on the topic you are investigating. In some cases, it may be appropriate to use information from a blog or social media platform like Tumblr if you are researching anorexia or self-harm, for example. Information from a politician or a biased media source like Fox News or MSNBC might be an important part of your research, but should be flagged in your writing as probably biased. Point out to the reader that this is not a fully credible source that you are using because it represents an interesting opinion or a trend that is important to your topic. **Failure to “flag” such a report as biased may result in your teacher assuming that you don’t know the difference between a credible and a non-credible source.**

**Final Tip:** When in doubt about a source’s credibility, ask yourself the following question—If the author is wrong, is there a chance that she will suffer professional consequences for her errors? If the answer is no, the source is probably not credible.