



# Critically Evaluating Sources



# Areas to consider

- *Authority* of the author
- *Objectivity* of the author
- *Quality* of the work
- *Background* of the publisher
- *Currency* of the work
- *Relevancy* of the work



# Questions to ask

To evaluate authority



# Who is the author?

- Common places to find the name of the author:
  - Title page (Books and reports)
  - Top of the first page (articles and book chapters)
  - End of the article (encyclopedias)



# What are the author's credentials?

- What to look for:
  - Relevant university degree
    - Do they have a degree in the discipline you are researching?
  - Institutional affiliation
    - Where does he or she work?
  - Relevant field or employment experience
  - Past writings
- Where can you find this information?
  - Examine the item for information about the author
  - Search the web for the author's homepage
  - Search the databases or library's catalog for other sources by the author

# What is the author's reputation among his/her peers?

- What to look for:
  - Have they been cited by other works?
  - Were they mentioned in your textbook or by your professor?
- Where to look:
  - Search [Google Scholar](#) and use the “cited by...” link.
  - If you find an article in JSTOR you can see other articles that are in JSTOR that cite the article in the “Summary” section



# Who is the publisher?

- Questions to ask:
  - Commercial, trade, institutional, other?
  - Basic values or goals?
  - Specialization?
- Where to look:
  - Examine the publisher's website



# Questions to ask

To evaluate objectivity





# Does the author state the goals of the publication?

- Questions to ask:
  - Is the goal to inform, explain, or advocate?
  - Are they selling a service?
  - Does the publication serve as a soapbox?
- Where to look:
  - Skim the foreword, preface, abstract and/or introduction of the work

# Does the author exhibit a bias?

- Questions to ask:

- Does the author acknowledge their bias?
- Are both sides of a controversial issue presented?

- Where to look:

- Skim the abstract or introduction, and conclusion
- Examine the work for
  - Inflammatory language
  - Images or graphics to persuade you to the author's point of view
  - Arguments or supporting facts
  - A bibliography that does or does not include multiple points of view

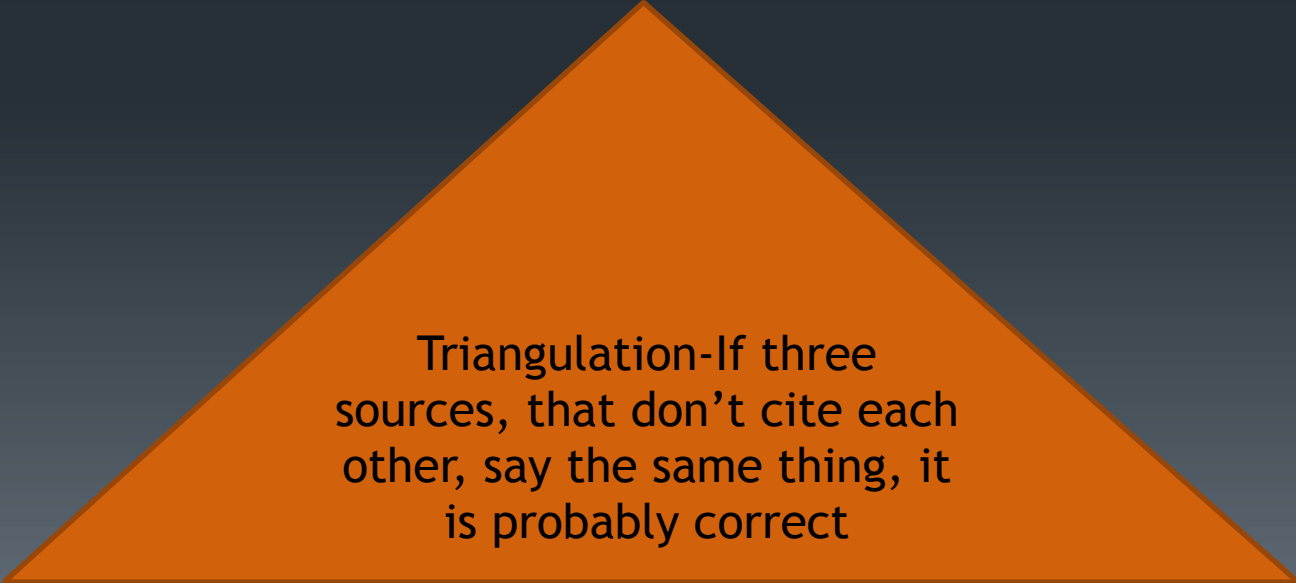
# Does the information appear to be valid and well researched?

- Questions to ask:

- Are arguments supported by evidence?
- Are opposing view points addressed?
- Are authoritative sources cited?

- Where to look:

- Verify facts
- Examine cited sources for authority and objectivity



Triangulation-If three sources, that don't cite each other, say the same thing, it is probably correct



# Questions to ask

To evaluate quality

# Is the information well organized?

- What to look for:

- Logical structure
- Main points clearly presented
- Text flows well
- Argument is not repetitive

- Where to look:

- Skim the text
- Look through the table of contents

# Did the author use proper grammar?

- Check for spelling and grammar errors



# Questions to ask

To evaluate for currency



# When was it published?

- Look at the copyright date
- Usually look for sources from within the last 10 years
- Does the topic require more current information?
  - Science, medicine, current events
  - For these topics only use sources from the last 1-3 years, unless you are looking at a historical perspective
- Has the source been updated? (books)
  - Search the library catalog for the book and click on the “other editions” link





# Questions to ask

To evaluate relevance

# Is the content appropriate for your research topic?

- Is the source scholarly or popular?
- Can you identify the format (e.g., book, article, website, etc.)
- Is the content primary, secondary, or bibliographic?