

Credible versus Non Credible Sources

Credible sources are ones the reader can trust. We trust that the author’s ideas are his or her own and can be backed up with evidence. When writing a research paper, doing research, or reading for background information, writers should ALWAYS use a credible source. Citing non-credible sources can damage a writer’s relationship with his or her readers. *Keep in mind that the definition of a credible source depends on the audience, the topic, and the discipline.*

Credible	Non Credible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journals by authors respected and well-known in their specific fields • Websites from credible institutions like Mayo Clinic, Department of Justice, and University-affiliated institutions • Materials published in the last ten years (when more recent information is available) • Websites: The more information available, the more credible the website. There is a specific author, the audience is clear, the purpose is informative not biased, and the information is regularly updated. Also look for websites ending in .edu and .gov. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs, facebook posts, or other self-authored sites • Research articles without citations • Websites with information not from an author or governmental department • Materials published over 10 years ago or have theories that are clearly out-of-date • Websites: There is not much information available. If the purpose is not informative but may have other motives, like to persuade, the site may not be credible. The website is not regularly updated or the author is unreliable.

Questions to ask when determining whether or not something is a credible source:

- *Who is the author? Is he or she known and respected in the specific field?* Citing a speech from Martin Luther King Jr. on Civil Rights is usually a better choice than citing a speech from John Williams, who is an unknown person.
- *When was the material published?* Typically, dated publications, from the 1990s and older, may have dated information, and more current information may be available. The exception for this is with primary sources, and primary versus secondary sources are discussed below. Biases can sometimes be masked. Look for over-generalized statements or authors writing for religious or political groups.

- *What is the purpose of this source?* When we find sources, we want to find clear and unbiased sources that give the facts. We don't want opinions that aim to alter and persuade people's views.
- *How is this source proved?* Does the publication have references and evidence to prove its point? If the publication just gives claims without support, it may not be the best source.
- *Is this website from an organization or author I can trust?* Websites from governmental agencies or institutions are most likely better resources than a website anyone can post to, like Wikipedia.

Primary and Secondary Sources

What is a primary source? A primary source is a document, speech, or other piece of evidence that was created during the period of study. Examples of primary sources include: autobiographies, letters, diary entries, photographs, public records, poetry, news film footage, and speeches.

What is a secondary source? A secondary source provides interpretation and analysis of primary sources. Examples of secondary sources include: textbooks, encyclopedias, databases, and literary analyses or critiques.