THE CREDIBILITY CHECKLIST

Citations – Citations can tell you a lot about a source that you are looking to use such as the author, title, and publication information (place & date). Older sources may not acceptable for your research (especially in the sciences) and the publisher can give you information about the quality & professionalism of the content.

☐ Does the author use facts to support his/her claims?
☐ Are their citations respectable?
☐ Is there a bibliography?
☐ Is it easy to check their sources?

Content/Coverage – Check the content of the document you are looking to read. If it’s a book, look over the index and table of contents to see if it matches your research needs. You can also check the book’s bibliography/citations for further insight. If it’s an article, check the abstract to get an idea of what the article is about.

☐ How extensive is the research? Is it fact based or an editorial?
☐ Does the table of contents match the needs of your research? The index?

Purpose/Audience – The content of a document can be meant for a variety of different people; the purpose of Entertainment Weekly is different from the purpose of a scholarly journal, for example. The amount of background information needed on the topic and its depth can also be a good indication of the intended audience.

☐ What is the point of this document? To inform? To entertain? Why was it created?
☐ Who was meant to read this? Scholars? Casual readers? Specialists?
☐ Does the text require any previous knowledge on the topic? For example, is document too technical or too simple?

Authority of the Author – When we talk about authority, we are talking about the power an author has to educate on a certain topic or subject. Indicators of an author’s authority would be their education, background, previous experiences within the field, and previous publications. Professionals within the field are frequently cited by their peers, so it can be relatively easy to start identifying authors. Sometimes authors will belong to professional organizations as well.

☐ Who is the author and what are his/her qualifications? A degree? Experience in the field? An expert? Have they published other works on this topic?
☐ Are the author's qualifications able to be verified?
☐ Does the author have any institutional or organizational affiliations?
☐ Who is the publisher and what does that tell you about the source?
☐ Who owns or authored the website?
☐ Who is sponsoring the website other published works on this topic
Objectivity – The information you are evaluating should be objective in nature, meaning it is free from any personal feelings or prejudices the author may have. Facts can easily be verified and checked; however opinions, even though they may be based on facts, come from the author’s interpretation of these facts. The information should be well researched and the language used should be impartial.

- Is the information based more on fact or opinion?
- Are the facts accurately and completely cited?
- Is the author fair, balanced, and moderate in his/her views?

Currency – How often the information you are dealing with is updated. Different kinds of disciplines and subject matters have different kinds of standards when it comes to currency. Research in the humanities, for example, can still be relevant years after it has been published; however, research in the sciences can be very rapid and become out-of-date quickly. This is also relevant for newspaper publications and websites. Books will list their publication date on the title page and websites will often list them at the bottom of the page.

- If a website, is there a date indicating when the page was created or last updated?
- Is the information/content up to date, including the sources they cite?
- Did you check from broken links?
- Is the research current for your topic? Sciences often require the most up-to-date information, while the humanities can still have older research that is still valid