

The Purpose of Establishing Credibility

You must engage with the literature of the field to find sources of information that are credible, valid, and relevant to your topic of inquiry. You must engage with the literature of the field to refine the scope and the definitions associated with your inquiry. You must be able to explain why you chose to include certain sources of information or references over others. The questions associated with the credibility test below will help you make these choices.

Credibility Test Questions

Purpose: The reason the information exists.

- ▶ What is the purpose of the information, and do the authors make this purpose clear (inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade)?
- ▶ Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
- ▶ Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
- ▶ Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?

Accuracy: The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content.

- ▶ Where does the information come from?
- ▶ Is the information supported by evidence?
- ▶ Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- ▶ Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
- ▶ Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion?
- ▶ Are there spelling, grammar, or typographical errors?

Authority: The source of the information.

- ▶ Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
- ▶ What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations?
- ▶ Is the author qualified to write on the topic?
- ▶ Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address?
- ▶ Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? examples: .com .edu .gov .org .net

Relevance: The importance of the information for your needs.

- ▶ Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- ▶ Who is the intended audience?
- ▶ Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e., not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?
- ▶ Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?
- ▶ Would you be comfortable citing this source in your research paper?

Currency: The timeliness of the information.

- ▶ When was the information published or posted?
- ▶ Has the information been revised or updated?
- ▶ Does your topic require current information, or will older sources work as well?
- ▶ Are the links functional?