Evaluating Sources

Here are questions to keep in mind anytime you think about using a source for research.

Authority

- Is the author qualified to write on this topic?
  - Look for an author bio or list of credentials (degrees earned, work experience, etc.)
- Does the author include a list of resources that were used in the research?
  - Are the resources referenced trustworthy?

Scope & Content

- Is this a scholarly source? (see below for guidelines)
- Can you tell if it is based on fact or opinion?

Date

- Is the information in the publication outdated?
- If it is a web resource, can you tell when it was published and/or last revised?

Purpose

- Is the coverage biased or limited to one point of view?

Is it Scholarly or Popular?

**Scholarly Journal**

- Longer articles
- Authors are usually experts and their qualifications or affiliations are listed
- Written for a scholarly audience (people who specialize in that subject area)
- The title of the periodical usually indicates it is scholarly with words like “journal,” “bulletin,” or “review”
- Articles are factual, unemotional, scientific, and unbiased
- Many use technical language
- Little or no advertising
- List of references or footnotes always included
- May contain graphs, charts, or tables

**Popular Magazine**

- Shorter articles
- Author’s qualifications or affiliations are not listed
- Written for anyone to understand, even those who are not professionals in the field
- Articles might express personal opinion and may be biased
- Tone is informal and uses plain language
- Often contains many colorful pictures or illustrations
- Often contains advertisements for products and services
- Reference list or footnotes are not included

Uncertain about the types of sources to use in your research? Check with your professor.