Evaluating the Credibility of Your Sources

Remember, your use of sources is a means of supporting the argument you make. This means that the sources you reference need to be credible and authoritative. How do you know that your sources are of value? Ask yourself the following questions:

Is the source objective?
Evaluate Consistency. Sources that apply different standards to those who agree and disagree with them are suspect. If your source praises one politician for "changing to meet the needs of his constituency," but then criticizes an opposing politician for "changing his position with opinion polls," it is likely that the source is biased.

Who wrote it?
Research the author. A source is more credible if written by someone with a degree or other credentials in the subject of interest. If no author or organization is named, the source will not be viewed as very credible. However, if the author is presenting original work, evaluate the merit of the ideas-- not the credentials. Some questions that you should ask about the author are:
  o Where does the author work?
  o If the author is affiliated with a reputable institution or organization, what are its values and goals? Do they benefit financially by promoting a particular view?
  o What is his or her educational background?
  o What other works has the author published?
  o What experience does the author have?
  o Has this author been cited as a source by other scholars or experts in the field?

Is the piece timely and appropriate for its field?
Check the date. Find out when the source was published or revised. Sources should not be older than 10 years.

For whom is the source written?
Identify bias. If the source's author is known to be emotionally or financially connected with the subject, be aware that the source may not fairly represent all views. Sometimes research is necessary to determine relationships that indicate the possibility of bias.
  o Be conscious of wording that indicates judgment. Conclusions that describe something as "bad or good" or "right or wrong" should be examined

Variety of Reviews?
Check the reviews. Find reviews for the source. If the book is aimed at a layperson, check reviews online and see how and why others criticized the source. If there is significant controversy surrounding the validity of the source, you may wish to avoid using it, or examine it further with a skeptical eye.

Source Evaluation Cheat Sheet:

Examples of sources that are often the most credible:
- o Official government websites
- o Institutional sites that represent universities, regulatory agencies, governing bodies, and respected organizations with specific expertise (e.g., the Mayo Clinic)
- o Peer-reviewed journals
- o Reputable news sources

Examples of sources that are often considered less credible:
- o Blogs
- o Web forums
- o Individual or business websites
- o Materials published by an entity that may have an ulterior motive

Factors to Consider	Most Reliable	Possibly Reliable	Least Reliable
Type of source	Official websites Institutional sites Academic journals	Published material	Unfamiliar website
Author's background	Expert in the field	Educated on topic	Uncredited
Date published	Recently revised	Outdated	None
Depth of review	Peer-reviewed by reliable sources	Good public response; general approval	Controversial reviews
Sources cited	Citations referencing other well-cited works	Credible sources	None
Objectivity	Balanced, neutral	Sponsored source	Clearly biased

Writing & Research
Article Submission Assignment

For this assignment you will:
Find and read a credible article relating to your research topic that pertains to our current unit (the American Food Industry).

On a separate sheet of paper, typed, double-spaced:

1. Create a proper MLA citation for the article.

2. Provide a link to the article.

3. Explain why the article is credible, using the five criteria in the *Evaluating the Credibility of Your Sources* reading and video.

4. Explain why you chose this article and how it relates to your research topic.

5. Bullet specific information/statistics in the article that supports your point.

You do NOT have to submit the article – only the write-up; however, keep the article in a safe place for later reference in your research paper.

Sample Assignment:

Student Name   Mrs. Markolovic, February 7, 2016

1. Hong, J. J. (2009). Power of McDonald's 'Happy Meal'. *The Global Studies Journal, 2*(2), 143-154.

2. Link to article: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/27/business/mcdonalds-happy-meal-to-get-healthier.html?_r=0

3. Why I think this article is reputable: I think this article is reputable because it comes from *The New York Times*, which is a well-known and well-respected newspaper. Second, it has an author whose credentials I can look up. Finally, it is recent; the date is January 2013.

4. Why I chose this article/how it is relevant. I chose this article because I think I want to write my Fast Food Nation paper about McDonald's Happy Meals. We've been discussing how McDonald's has been under pressure to make their meals healthier and this article shows that they actually have changed some menu items. This article fits into the theme of the American Food Industry that we have been discussing in class because our society is so driven by food and the need for nutritional food, which leads to health discussions such as obesity.

- 8% of people that eat McDonalds in a month gained 3-6 pounds
- Obesity is the leading cause of heart disease

Grading Rubric:

Criteria	Excellent	Average	Struggling	No evidence of requirement
Article from reputable source (3 reasons explained)	100%	75%	60%	0%
Relevance of article explained to theme of study	100%	75%	60%	0%
Proper MLA citation created	100%	75%	60%	0%
Link to article provided	100%	75%	60%	0%