EVALUATING SOURCES

When performing research, evaluating your sources is a key component. Always apply the following guidelines, and consider the following questions:

- **Author**
  - Does the author identify his or her credentials?
    - Does he or she have the academic background to produce an article on the subject?
    - Does he or she offer a way to contact him or her?
    - Is he or she published elsewhere?

- **Date of publication**
  - Are you looking at the most current data available?
  - Is date of publication or last update displayed?
  - Keep in mind your topic.
    - If you are performing research on current environmental issues, research from 1993 is inappropriate.
    - However, if you are performing research on the fall of the Berlin wall, articles from 1989 are quite acceptable.

- **Audience**
  - Who is the intended audience?
    - Scholars and experts?
    - General public?
  - Is the material presented at the appropriate level?

- **Relevance**
  - Does the information cover the selected research topic?

- **Objectivity**
  - Is the information biased?
  - Was the author’s goal to inform, entertain, or influence?
  - If the source is a website, is the website sponsored by a company/organization that presents a certain viewpoint?

- **Accuracy**
  - Is the information provided accurate?
  - Are there grammatical errors within the writing?
  - Does the source provide links to other sources, a well documented reference list, or suggestions on further readings?
  - Is the source peer-reviewed?
Primary or Secondary Research

- Primary research presents original research methods or findings. Examples include:
  - A publication that presents new findings or theories
  - An eye-witness, first-hand account

- A secondary research does not present new research but rather provides a compilation or evaluation of previously presented material. Examples include:
  - An article summarizing research or data
  - Entries in most Reference books
  - Textbooks