

A Usable Source Rubric with Caveats

	3.00	2.00	1.00
Accuracy	Source is in broad agreement with other sources written by experts in the field. OR, source disagrees with them but provides clear, documented, verifiable evidence to the contrary. Remember that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence!	Source may agree or disagree with other sources accepted in the discipline but does not provide verifiable evidence for its positions that link to other established work in the field.	Source is an outlier among experts in the field and provides flawed, outdated, previously disproven, or unverified/unverifiable evidence. May cite only sources written by the same author or published by the same publisher.
Objectivity	Tone is neutral. Facts are presented without words that are meant to stir your emotions. The source cites other sources that agree with it as well as those that do not. Rebuttals are made with evidence, not personal attacks.	Source is neutral in tone but does not cite sources with differing views or refute them appropriately. Or, though it may cite others sources, it is persuasive in nature.	Tone is persuasive, language displays bias, and presentation of points is one-sided.
Timeliness	Source is relevant to the time period you intend to discuss, either as a primary source of the time period under study or representing state of the art research, depending on the discipline.	Source is somewhat out of the range of time you intend to discuss; however, it may still be relevant in describing context or <u>outcomes</u> .	Source is untimely and irrelevant.

8-9 This looks like a great source to use!

5-7 This may be a good source to use, as long as you provide some caveats and disclaimers.

3-4 This is not a good source to use!

Information Frames

Framing is an important concept to understand inasmuch as it shapes how information is shared and interpreted. Here are some examples:

1. **An editorial in the Tribune that laments how lazy and unmotivated millennials are instead of focusing on the moribund job market.**
2. **Someone who denies global warming by complaining about government overreach instead of discussing the science, itself.**
3. **A politician who wants to cut funding for scientific research and justifies it by only presenting examples of unpopular or frivolous-sounding studies.**
4. **Someone who editorializes about sexual assault by focusing on the culture of drinking on college campuses instead of the actual crime.**

These are ways of packaging information that attempt to delegitimize or minimize one aspect of the discussion while focusing almost entirely on another. Be wary of information sources that focus entirely on one aspect of a subject without showing how it relates to other aspects. Some typical frames are:

Pro-Industry vs. Anti-Industry

Pro-Social Issue vs. Anti-Social Issue

Pro-Environmental Concern vs. Anti-Environmental Concern

Pro-Government vs. Anti-Government

And others....

The information presented within these frameworks might be completely factual, but the presentation of the facts is seen only through the window that fits within the author's frame. Thus, it may exclude important information from the discussion.

Information Malpractice

Other things to be watchful for are the various kinds of information malpractice. Malpractice is defined as improper, illegal, or negligent activity. In the realm of research, here are some examples of *information malpractice*:



Conflict of interest: The authors or source have a conflict of interest in presenting the arguments they present.



Plagiarism: The authors have stolen the language or ideas of other sources without giving them credit.



Cherry-picking Science: The authors have tried to make a point by using only pieces of science that support their argument while ignoring other evidence that contradicts them.



Presenting History without its Context: The authors use quotes or historical events to make a point about the modern world without fully acknowledging the socio-political context in which those events happened.



False Equivalence: The author presents an equivalence between two competing sides of an argument, when in fact there is only superficial similarity.



Treating All Opinions as Equal: The author gives expert sources and non-expert sources equal weight.