

Bibliography 101: Credibility (Believe Me, It's Important!)

Whether you're scrolling through news on Instagram or citing your sources for a school project, it's imperative that you note which sources you get your information from. While we all deserve to be able to receive new information and take it as fact without much thought, this is not the reality we live in.

While any published work, whether it is on paper or on the Internet, can contain false information, fake information tends to spread more quickly and easily on the Internet. (This rings especially true when it comes to *fake news*.) This can be because the Internet allows people to write freely. Much of the news you'd find in a renowned newspaper is peer-reviewed and heavily fact-checked before publication. On the Internet, though, anyone can create a website and write whatever they want to. As humans, new or surprising information appeals to us. Fake news is often "new" or "surprising" because well, someone just made it up!

For example, you may have heard teachers ban Wikipedia as a citation for school projects. This isn't because they want to make your life harder! Wikipedia is one of the most popular reference sites on the Internet, but anyone with the motivation can edit articles however they want to. Wikipedia's only run by volunteers, so any such errors could go untouched for a very long time. Instead, a great method is to scroll to the bottom of the Wikipedia page you were hoping to cite and click on any external links from scholarly journals, trusted websites, or published books.

How can someone tell if a source is trustworthy, though? While it is difficult sometimes, there are some guidelines one can follow in order to make sure a source is reliable.

Before you trust a source, ask yourself the following questions.

- **Did an expert write this?** Make sure you can see the author of the article or the organization who brought this information to you. If possible, find articles that are not sponsored. If they are, check who's sponsoring what you're reading before you believe what is being said. This should also be written by someone with the necessary qualifications. Maybe you shouldn't believe an article about the health benefits of ice cream if it was written for a company that sells it! Credible websites often include ones that end in .gov (US government), .edu (educational institutions), .org (recognized organization), .mil (US military). Avoid websites ending in .net, or even .com if you don't recognize the name and there aren't many positive results online.
- **Does the author have any bias?** Is it clear to you what they're trying to accomplish by writing this article? Hopefully, they aim to distribute trustworthy information on time. Look up the author or organization shown and see if they are generally considered reliable.
- **When did someone last update this?** Check if the links shown on the website still work as you're reading the article. If you look around on many websites, you can see if an article has been updated in the last few months. Even the most trustworthy information from 10 years ago might no longer be relevant.
- **Has anyone checked this?** Has this information been peer-reviewed? If you can't see many other outlets reporting on this same story or talking about this same topic, your article may not be truthful. Is there any evidence from other sources that at least support what is being said?
- **Does this relate to what I'm saying?** If you're using

this information for a presentation, project, or report of some kind, you need to know that it is related to your topic! Consider the intended audience and any other sources you could use.

Now that you know all about checking credibility online, think twice before you believe something you see on the Internet.

Next time on Bibliography 101, we'll talk about citing your sources. See you here later in 2022! Happy New Year!

Read more about credibility and fake news at the following links:

- [How Much Of The Internet Is Fake? A Lot. : NPR](#)
- [How do I know if my sources are credible/reliable? – FAQ](#)
- [“Fake” News – Library Guides at Penn State University](#)
- [Fake news: What is it? And how to spot it – CBBC Newsround](#)