EVALUATING SOURCES

Before using a source for research, you should carefully evaluate it and its contents. This is especially true of websites which aren't subject to the same vetting process as published sources such as books, magazine, newspaper, or journal articles. Below is a list of points to consider.

✓ **AUTHORITY** – who is the author/publisher? (person, business, or organization)
   ▪ The more you know about the author, the better.
   ▪ What makes the author a trustworthy, credible source of information on the topic?
   ▪ Are the author's credentials listed? (personal or professional experience, education, other qualifications).
   ▪ Is the author associated with a reputable university, group, or organization?

   Websites:
   ▪ Be sure to distinguish between the author of the information and, if different, the webmaster responsible for the website. Look for an "about us" or "FAQ" page.
   ▪ Does the site include contact information? (phone number, address, e-mail).

✓ **PURPOSE** – what is the author's purpose?
   ▪ To educate or inform? (provide facts, figures, research).
   ▪ To advocate a position or point of view? (convince you to agree).
   ▪ To market a product or service? (persuade you to buy).
   ▪ To entertain or amuse?

✓ **SCOPE** – how detailed is the source?
   ▪ Does it give a basic overview or is it an in-depth study?
   ▪ Is the depth or coverage enough for your needs
   ▪ Is it directed at the general public or does it require specialized knowledge to understand?

✓ **ACCURACY/QUALITY** – is the information within the source verifiable?
   ▪ Does the source cite or refer to other sources or experts that support it?
   ▪ Is the data/information based on experiments, observations, measurements, analyses, interpretations, or conclusions?
   ▪ Are conclusions based on research or actual figures that can be checked in other sources?
   ▪ Does the source contain misspelled words or other typographical errors?

✓ **CURRENCY** – is the source current? Does it need to be?
   ▪ Currency is especially important in medicine and the sciences where new developments occur frequently.
   ▪ What is the publication date?

   Websites:
   ▪ When was the website last updated, modified, or revised?

- Are the links current and working?

✓ **OBJECTIVITY** – is the source biased?
- Just because a source is biased doesn't mean you shouldn't use it, as long as you recognize it may represent only one point of view & can separate facts from opinions.
- Does the source contain opinions not backed up by evidence?

Websites:
- Does the website include advertising or is it trying to sell something? If so, is there a conflict of interest?

✓ **REPUTATION** – what do others say about the source or its author?
- Does the source or its author have a good reputation?
- Do other sources back up the source's claims about itself?
- Do other sources consider it to be credible?
- Was the source published by a reputable publisher or in a reputable magazine, newspaper, or journal? If so, it was vetted by reviewers or editors before being accepted for publication.
- Has the source been peer reviewed? Articles published in peer reviewed journals have been vetted by other experts ("peers") in that field.

Websites:
- Investigating a website or its author's reputation is very important because websites don't go through the same vetting process as published sources.
- Remember, if the website is untrustworthy, the claims it makes about itself are probably untrustworthy as well.