**Determining Whether Your Source is Scholarly**

When writing scientific and academic papers, you need to be able to determine which sources will best provide you accurate information on the topic you are researching. You will want to find thoroughly researched and reliable sources to base the ideas in your paper on. Below are a few questions you can ask yourself to help you determine if the source is good to use or not.

* **Who wrote it?**
  + Firstly, determine if there is an author provided in the article.
    - If there is no author stated, then look to the company or organization that produced the work.
  + Secondly, look at the credentials of the person who wrote the article. Do you have reason to believe this person or organization extensively knows this topic?
  + **Red Flags:**
    - There is no author provided and the article is not written by a credible institution or government agency that would employ authors that are likely knowledgeable on the topic (e.g. MayoClinc or CDC).
    - The author does not provide credentials or the author’s credentials do not make them likely to be knowledgeable on the topic.
* **Who is likely to read it?**
  + Determine if the source is academic writing or popular writing based on the tone, language and content. Think about how “readable” the article is to the average person. Does the author use jargon specific to the field?
    - Popular writing will typically be easy to read as it is written for the general public and does not expect the reader to have prior knowledge on the topic (e.g. popular magazines, newspapers, blogs).
    - Academic writing will contain jargon more specific to the topic of interest and will often include lengthy evidence and analysis. This will usually make it more difficult to read for someone without prior knowledge on the topic (e.g. clinicians portions of websites like the CDC, scholarly journals, and academic books).
  + **Red Flags:**
    - While popular writing may be easier to understand, it is not always the most thoroughly researched and the authors may not always have the credibility to accurately discuss the topic.
* **Who edited it and how recently was it edited/written?**
  + Determine if the site or publication has an editor and if so, what are their credentials. Can you find information on the editing and publication process to determine the extent of material review?
    - Most credibly websites like those of governmental agencies will have sections stating when the material was last reviewed and/or last updated as shown in the image below.



From CDC’s website on *E. coli* (*Escherichia coli*) - <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/index.html>

* + Look to see if there is a peer-review process for the article. Most, but not all scholarly journal articles are also reviewed by other experts in the same field of study. This process better ensures that the research and writing of the article are valid before the article is approved for publication.
  + **Red Flags**:
    - An article with no peer-review or editor does not necessarily contain incorrect information, but there is an increased risk compared to articles that have been examined by an editor or other experts in the field.
* **Does the author cite their sources? If so, how many sources and what are the sources?** 
  + As you learned in previous assignments, it is important in scholarly writing to cite the sources of your information. Scholarly articles will provide citations for their sources of information whether in a standard format (e.g. MLA or APA) or through links to the sources.
  + If the article does provide citations or links to their sources, you should always check those sources before using the information in your paper. You want to make sure the sources actually state the information the article discusses. This is particularly important for less reviewed sources like newspapers and popular magazines, but does apply to all types of sources.
  + Most scholarly articles will reference information from multiple sources. Generally, the more sources that are utilized in the article, the more thoroughly the author researched the topics discussed. Scholarly articles will often cite to primary sources for information they used, while less scholarly articles cite to secondary or even tertiary sources.
    - Primary vs Secondary sources according to HCC’s Library: <https://howardcc.libguides.com/primaryandsecondarysources-rh>
  + **Red Flags**:
    - Articles that do not provide citations or links to their sources or articles whose sources do not actually match with what the article is discussing.
* **Other questions to consider:** Why was it written? Does the author(s) have any bias in writing the article? Is the content relevant?

\*Adapted from “Is it Scholarly?” by Indian University Bloomington Library.

<https://libraries.indiana.edu/file/is-it-scholarly-pdf>