ENGLISH, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

Evaluating sources

Difficulty level: Advanced

English, Literacy, and Communication

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Overview of the concept

This is how you judge whether a website or article is trustworthy enough to use for homework or a decision. You check who wrote it, when it was written, and what evidence it gives, instead of believing everything you read. A source that fails those checks might still be interesting, but it is not one to build an argument on. It is the difference between research and just collecting opinions.



Rule

Evaluating sources: a reliable source names its author, was checked by experts, gives evidence you can check, and is up to date.

Ask: who wrote it, was it checked, can the claims be checked, and when was it written? A source that fails those checks is not one to build an argument on.

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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Which source is more reliable for a science fact: a peer-reviewed journal or a random social media post?

SOLUTION

Ask: who wrote it, and was it checked by experts? A journal is checked by experts before publication.

A random post has no such checking.

So the peer-reviewed journal is more reliable.

EXAMPLE 2

Q Which source is more reliable for a news event: a major newspaper report with named sources or an anonymous post with no evidence?

SOLUTION

Ask: can the claims be checked? The newspaper names its sources.

The anonymous post gives no evidence to check.

So the major newspaper report is more reliable.

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Practice questions

1

Which is more reliable?

A Textbook

B A stranger's blog post with no sources

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2

Which is more reliable?

A Official government statistics page

B A meme

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3 Which is more reliable?

A A forum rumour

B Doctor's medical advice site reviewed by doctors

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4 Which is more reliable?

A Primary document

B A later retelling with no sources

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5 Which is more reliable?

A An ad selling a product

B University research page

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6 Which is more reliable?

A Book by an expert with references

B A post that says 'trust me'

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7 Which is more reliable?

A One anonymous claim

B Two independent newspapers agreeing

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8 Which is more reliable?

A Recent source

B A 100-year-old source for today's population

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9

Which is more reliable?

A Source that shows its evidence

B One that hides it

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10

Which is more reliable?

A Encyclopedia entry with references

B A joke page

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ANSWER KEY

1. Textbook
2. Official government statistics page
3. Doctor's medical advice site reviewed by doctors
4. Primary document
5. University research page
6. Book by an expert with references
7. Two independent newspapers agreeing
8. Recent source
9. Source that shows its evidence
10. Encyclopedia entry with references

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