Evaluating sources

Authorship/Sponsorship
- Does the Web site or document have a named author? Who is paying for the website (sponsor)?
- If there is an author, can you tell whether he or she is knowledgeable and credible? .
- Do a separate search to find independent information about the author.
- Watch out for websites that end in ".com.co" as they are often fake versions of real news sources.

Checking for signs of bias
- Does the site present a balanced or a biased point of view?
- Does the story make you REALLY ANGRY? If so, you should read other articles on the subject.
- Is the author or publisher associated with a special-interest group, such as Greenpeace or the National Rifle Association, which might present only one side of an issue?
- Are alternative views presented and addressed? How fairly does the author treat opposing views?

Assessing an argument
- What is the author's central claim or thesis?
- How does the author support this claim—with relevant and sufficient evidence or with just a few anecdotes or emotional examples? Does the information appear elsewhere? Does it contradict what you have read in other sources?

Purpose and audience
- Why was the site created: To argue a position? To sell a product? To inform readers?
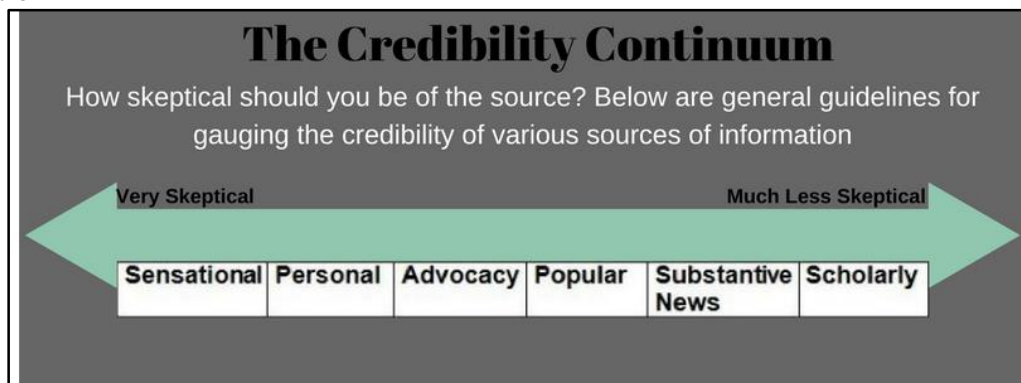- Who is the site's intended audience?

Currency
- Is the website up to date? Check for the date of publication or the latest update, often located at the bottom of the home page or at the beginning or end of an internal page.
- If many of the links no longer work, the site may be too dated for your purposes.

How is the content presented?
- How the content is written speaks volumes about the trustworthiness of the information.
- But remember – not all well written articles/websites are true.

Popular or Academic source?
- Popular magazines are written by journalists or professional writers for a general audience and rarely contain full citations. Examples – Prevention magazine, Time, Catster.
- Scholarly journals are written by faculty, researchers, or scholars in the field and tend to be longer articles about a narrower topic. They include full citations for sources and are often peer reviewed. Examples – The American Journal of Political Science, Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association

The Credibility Continuum

How skeptical should you be of the source? Below are general guidelines for gauging the credibility of various sources of information

Very Skeptical — Much Less Skeptical

Sensational	Personal	Advocacy	Popular	Substantive News	Scholarly

Source: Franklin Pierce University, DiPietro Library

Types of Domains

– websites are grouped by the type of organization providing the information. These are some of the most common.

.gov – This information is from a federal government site and medical (human or animal) information is considered credible.

>   Ex.   www.nih.gov   (National Institutes of Health)

.edu – educational institution. If it is from a department or research area of the school it is usually considered credible.

>   Ex.   http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

.com – commercial site. Information from these sites must be evaluated. Many sites offer their information in the best light possible as they are trying to promote something for its public relations value or to sell you something.

>   Ex.   www.webmd.com

.net – derived from the word *network* and originally intended for internet service providers but has become an alternative to .com. Information must be evaluated for credibility.

>   Ex.   www.slideshare.net

.org – originally designed to represent a non-profit site or a research or scientific society but any organization can register using this domain. All information must be evaluated for credibility.

>   Ex. www.redcross.org