Fact Checking & Source Evaluation

SIFT & PICK

What Makes an Information Source "Good?"

"Good" sources include those that provide complete, current, factual information, and/or credible arguments based on the information creator's original research, expertise, and/or use of other reliable sources.

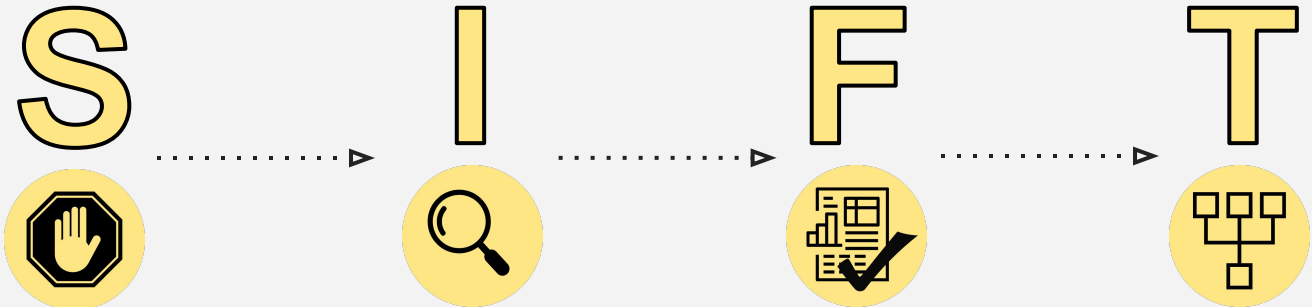Whether a source is a good choice for you depends on your information needs and how you plan to use the source.

Evaluating Sources Using Lateral & Vertical Reading

The **SIFT* & PICK** approach to evaluating sources helps you select quality sources by practicing:

➡️ **Lateral Reading (SIFT):** fact-checking by *examining other sources* and internet fact-checking tools; and

⬇️ **Vertical Reading (PICK):** *examining the source itself* to decide whether it is the best choice for your needs.

*The SIFT method was created by Mike Caulfield under a CC BY 4.0 International License.

S   I   F   T

Stop
- Check your emotions before engaging
- Do you know and trust the author, publisher, publication, or website?
  - If not, use the following fact-checking strategies before reading, sharing, or using the source in your research

Investigate the source
- Don't focus on the source itself for now
- Instead, read laterally
  - Learn about the source's author, publisher, publication, website, etc. from *other* sources, such as Wikipedia
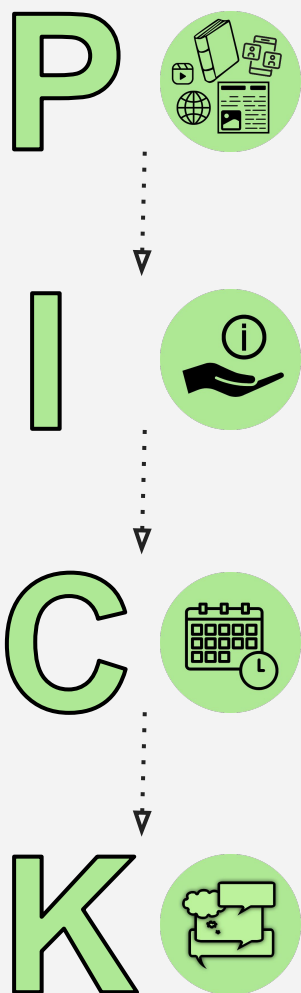
Find better coverage
- Focus on the information rather than getting attached to a particular source
- If you can't determine whether a source is reliable, trade up for a higher quality source
- Professional fact checkers build a list of sources they know they can trust

Trace claims to the original context
- Identify whether the source is original or re-reporting
- Consider what context might be missing in re-reporting
- Go "upstream" to the original source
  - Was the version you saw accurate and complete?

Continued on next page ➡️

This work by Ellen Carey is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. 04/17/2023

Purpose / Genre / Type
- Determine the *type of source* (book, article, website, social media post, etc.)
  - Why and how it was created? How it was reviewed before publication?
- Determine the *genre* of the source (factual reporting, opinion, ad, satire, etc.)
- Consider whether the *type* and *genre* are appropriate for your information needs

Information Relevance / Usefulness
- Consider how well the content of the source addresses your *specific* information needs
  - Is it *directly* related to your topic?
  - *How* does it help you explore a research interest or develop an argument?

Creation Date
- Determine when the source was *first* published or posted
  - Is the information in the source (including cited references) up-to-date?
- Consider whether newer sources are available that would add important information

Knowledge-Building
- Consider how this source relates to the body of knowledge on the topic
  - Does it echo other experts' contributions? Does it challenge them in important ways?
  - Does this source contribute something new to the conversation?
- Consider what voices or perspectives are missing or excluded from the conversation
  - Does this source represent an important missing voice or perspective on the topic?
  - Are other sources available that better include those voices or perspectives?
- How does this source help you to build and share your own knowledge?

Fact Checking & Source Evaluation Resources

Online Fact-Checking Sites
- Global Fact-Checking Sites
- FactCheck.org
- PolitiFact
- Snopes

Source Evaluation Guides & Tutorials
- Better News Fact Checking
- First Draft Verifying Online Information

Free Interactive Ebooks & Online Courses
- Check, Please! Starter Course
- CTRL-F: Find the Facts
- Introduction to College Research
- Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers

Need help? Ask your librarian!