Evaluating information sources is an important part of the research process. You need to be able to determine whether an information source – like a book, an article, or a website – is reliable and academic before you decide to quote or paraphrase it in your assignments. But how do you do that? This video will provide an overview of how to do that.
The questions you should ask will stem from these basics of critical thinking: Who, what, when, where, why, and how.
Who?

- Who wrote it?
- Who else is involved?
- Who did they write it for?

Who wrote the source? What credentials does that person have, like an advanced degree or awards in that field?

Also look for who else was involved in making the source: publishers, sponsors of the study, people being interviewed... any person or group associated with the source could introduce bias.

Who was the source written for? Academic writing is aimed at scholars in the field, while popular writing is usually for entertainment purposes, or for a general audience without specialized knowledge of the topic.
What?

- What is it really about?
- What are you supposed to use?

What is the source really about? Just because your keywords appear in an article, that doesn’t mean it suits your needs. Refer to your outline or thesis statement often to make sure you stay on track.

Sometimes you will be asked to find specific types of sources, like scholarly journal articles or sources published within a specific date range. Refer back to your assignment requirements often.
Many sources are digitized long after they were originally written, so make sure to check for both a creation date and a publication date. You need to know when something was originally written to know if it could be outdated. Compare the date on your source to important dates in your topic to see if they were written after important new information was discovered.

When?

- When was it created/written?
- When was it published?
- Is the information outdated?
Publishers can introduce bias by choosing to publish only articles that agree with a certain viewpoint. Publishers don’t have to be book companies; they can be the website on which information appears.

Be critical of where you accessed the source. Library databases are more likely to offer scholarly sources than social media sites or Google results, because they don’t have rigorous screening processes; anyone can share links.
Consider why the author wrote this source. Academic purposes would be sharing results of their research with other researchers, or presenting a new theory about their field of study. Non-academic purposes might be to influence the reader to buy something or vote a certain way, or give you a strong emotional response to the information they’ve presented.

Remember that you, too, have bias, and you might only be choosing sources you agree with. Look for a wide variety of sources to be balanced in your research.
You have to cite your sources, but your sources have to cite theirs, too. Check for citations. Be wary of pseudo-quantitative phrases like “most people” or “the majority”... these should be backed up by hard numbers from reliable sources.

Read carefully to make sure the information is being presented accurately, in context, and without appeals to your emotions.
Evaluating Information Sources
How do you determine if a resource is reliable and academic?

If you still aren’t sure, ask a librarian or your instructor about a specific source.