**Evaluating Sources Rhetorically**

How you evaluate a source depends on the purpose of your research. Consider how the given source might inform your research and if it provides the most appropriate information for your purpose.

### Purpose
- What is the intended purpose? (to inform, to argue, to persuade, etc.)
- What information or methods are used to achieve the intended purpose?
- Is the author successful in achieving their purpose? How (not)?

### Audience
- For whom is the source intended?
- What is the purpose or scope of the publication in which the source appears?
- Is this a scholarly or popular source? A professional/trade journal?
- Is the language difficult to understand? (If so, you may wish first to gather more background information or sources written for a general audience.)

### Relevance
- Is the content appropriate for your purpose?
- What does the source add to an understanding of your topic or argument?
- How does the source relate to other information you’ve found?
- How does the source relate to your ideas or argument?
- Is there a list of references? It may point you to other relevance sources.

### Authorship
- What are the author’s credentials or background in this area?
- Has this author written other things on this same topic?

### Bias
- Almost all sources have some degree of bias, but a well-reasoned argument considers multiple viewpoints.
- Is the information primarily fact or opinion?
- Does the author appear to have a strong bias, whether explicit or implied?
- Does the author present multiple sides of issues?
- Is the information supported by research?
- Has the author provided sufficient evidence?
- Does the author use highly-charged or emotional language?

### Currency
- Some research topics will require more up-to-date information than others. For example, scientific topics tend to require more current sources than to many humanities-focused topics.
- When was the source published?
- Do you need current information?

### Writing Style
- Are ideas logically and clearly presented?
- Is the writing clear and grammatically correct?
When evaluating a source, consider its rhetorical purpose and function. The BEAM model of rhetorical source use describes four main ways sources are often used.

**The BEAM Model**

**Background**
General information or factual evidence used to provide context
Example: encyclopedia article, dictionary definition

**Exhibits/Evidence**
Materials a writer analyzes/interprets
Example: literary or artistic works, field observations, scientific specimens, contemporary reviews, historical documents

**Argument sources**
Materials whose claim a writer engages
Example: scholarly articles, opinion pieces

**Method/theory sources**
Materials from which a writer adopts a concept or manner of working/thinking
Examples: references to theories/methods used by the author (e.g., feminism, New Historicism, direct observation, mixed methods)