

Evaluating Sources

When writing a research paper, it is important to evaluate the sources you are considering very closely. A quick and easy way to begin evaluating sources is to apply the **STAR Method** of evaluation. Dr. Kim Stallings developed the method as a simple means for students in her writing classes to improve critical reading skills as they worked on research papers. The method is summarized below.

Source material provides evidence for you to use in structuring and argumentative or research style essay. When evaluating those sources, they should be:

Sufficient. There should be *enough* evidence (examples, data) offered in the source to support the authors position, claim, opinion.

Verify that the connection between the author's claim and the evidence is strong enough and that the connection is sufficiently explained.

ASK QUESTIONS: Who is the intended audience?
How easily will they "accept" the claim and evidence?
How much proof would the audience need?

Typical. The evidence offered should be typical of the "topic." Would most people involved or interested in the topic accept the evidence as measurable and important criteria?

Are there other pieces of evidence that are similar?
If there is no other evidence, the author should **SAY SO**, or clearly state that the evidence is a "new" premise in order for the evidence to be accepted as typical for the topic in the future.

Accurate. Is the evidence correct and is it presented without bias?
Is the evidence presented in the correct context?
Are statistics / data / reports / outside sources revealed and explained?
Does the language / tone / presentation method create an unfair bias?
Does the language used berate, belittle, disparage, or attack a person / group?
It should focus on the event or topic itself to be accurate, not merely the author of a contradictory position.

Most importantly—can the evidence presented actually *be* verified, measured, or authenticated? For example, if a source states it is "two miles from Helms Dorm to Shooters Bar & Grill," you could actually verify that accuracy yourself. Yes, it's *measurable*.

Reliable. Is the author "respected" or known to hold a specific "position?" And, are the sources the *author* used as evidence respected, biased, valid, etc.,

Check the credentials, education, experience, past publications of the author and/or the publication.

Ask where the evidence originates? A professional organization, web cites, special interest group, etc. Does that source have a bias or agenda?

Is the evidence directly "linked" to the claim? Does it contain any logical fallacies?