

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN EVALUATING SOURCES

1. What is the **source** of the article? That is, where was it published? [scholarly journal, popular magazine, respected newspaper, government department, university publication, or an individual's website?] The most reliable source is a **peer reviewed journal**, but other sources can be considered reliable if they provide information about the author and a list of sources that readers can use to verify the information in the article.
2. What is the author's **purpose**? Beware of articles that contain one-sided opinion only—without factual support or acknowledgement of opposing views. You'll get more out of an article which attempts to **inform** readers of the facts surrounding an issue. If the issue is controversial, a good argument should show some awareness of the opposing side's reasons and have an answer for them.
3. What is the **date** of the article? Does the date affect its usefulness? [Information about some issues—such as embryonic stem cell research—is constantly changing as scientists make discoveries. Thus, an article from the year 2000 **might** be outdated, **unless** its purpose is to give background information, explaining what an embryonic stem cell is and why scientists think it could be useful in medicine.] Determining the **purpose** of the article can help you to decide whether the information is out of date or still useful.
4. What **conclusions** does the author arrive at? Do they seem **reasonable** to you, based on the facts presented? How well does the author **support** these conclusions? Does the support seem adequate to lead you to the same conclusions? In other words, do you find the article **persuasive**? **Why or why not?**
5. Does the writer list his or her **sources**? If you can't tell where the information in the article came from, then you have no way to check it. For you to consider an article to be a **reliable** source of information, you must have **some** way to verify the information in it. This is one major advantage of scholarly journals over popular magazines. Magazines such as Time or Newsweek don't provide a list of sources or else make vague statements about sources, such as "Sources close to the President say . . ." Most articles in a scholarly or professional journal, such as the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) will provide a list of sources.