



PART 1: CITATION

To “cite” a source means to give the specific details necessary to check its origin, that is, the citation tells you how to find the source to be certain that it actually exists and is available to the public.



If there is **no** citation, then **STOP** now. You are done with this source and you should look somewhere else for information. If someone wants you to believe their ideas, then you have the right to know who they are. That is, “anonymous” is always suspect.

If there is a citation of some kind, then go on to PART 2.

PART 2: INSPECT

Score each numbered question from zero (for a poor source) up to 10 (for a great source).

Investigate the citation!

___ 1. Is the source is real and available?

Necessary facts? For this category, consider just the content of the information.

___ 2. Is the information complete or is any essential information missing from this source?

___ 3. Is the information easily understood or is it overly specialized?

Speaker? Identify the author, editor, researcher, artifact or whatever is presenting this information.

___ 4. Is this 1st-person knowledge? (comes from direct observation such as a participant, eye-witness, contemporary or a known expert who has deep experience)

___ 5. Is this 2nd-hand knowledge? (comes from someone who uses the knowledge of other people?)

Does this interviewer, editor, researcher, etc. offer something helpful to you such as organizing complex material, providing perspective either in time or space, or covering subjects where the knowledge from direct observation is missing, incomplete or very difficult to access?

Purpose? Here you examine the intentions, motives, independence or bias of the source.

___ 6. Does the source present various points of view (better) or just one (worse)?

___ 7. Is the source free from trying to persuade you about anything?

Evidence? Here you examine the form in which the information comes to you.

___ 8. Primary source. Is this account still in its ORIGINAL form just as the author recorded it?

___ 9. Secondary sources are all other accounts, including ALL copies.

Each time that a source is copied, translated, or edited the chance for error increases, but secondary sources can be helpful because they are usually cheap, widely available and often are already evaluated by methods such as peer review. However, anything that has been digitized is a copy which can easily be altered, forged, or misrepresented. So, the question becomes, “Can this secondary source be helpful to you?”

Context? Decide if the source presents proper evidence with appropriate relationships.

A. Are a sufficient quantity of facts presented to allow you to see a pattern in the information?

B. Are the supporting features necessary for you to understand the facts included (e.g. index, glossary, explanation of abbreviations, graphics, links)?

C. Is the information relevant to your interest in this subject and is this connection explained in a reasonable manner?

___ 10. Are sufficient data points and adequate background included?

_____ **Total score out of 100 possible points.**

Test the information from this source by comparing it to what you already know from other reliable sources. Use the guidelines explained in PART 3 on the next page to help you to reach a logical conclusion.

PART 3: TRUTH and LOGIC

A source could pass all of the criteria on the INSPECT test but still lead to faulty conclusions.

Does the source make conclusions based on the information it presents?

YES

NO

Use the guidelines below to decide if the conclusion is logical.
Score by checking T (true) or F (false) for each guideline.

Use these guidelines below to help you to improve the conclusions that *you* draw from the information.

DEDUCTIVE REASONING

(Uses logic to draw conclusions from general principles. You are looking for *causation*, the process in which one thing necessarily is responsible for or causes another thing.)

T F

- _____ _____ 1. Does the source avoid presenting a correlation (two things happening at the same time) and then claiming that this is causation? Remember, correlation is not causation!
- _____ _____ 2. Does the source present multiple causes (better) rather than claiming that only one cause (worse) leads to a certain result? The more complex a subject is, the more important it is to consider multiple causes.
- _____ _____ 3. The source should distinguish between proximate causes (those happening immediately prior) and remote causes (a chain of causes & effects). Both types of causes can be important, so does the source present BOTH?
- _____ _____ 4. The source should explicitly explain the process or mechanism by which the causes lead to the effect, so does the source show a clear connection which answers the question WHY or HOW?

INDUCTIVE REASONING

(Builds support by providing the strongest possible facts and assumptions from which to draw a conclusion.)

T F

- _____ _____ 5. Is the conclusion PUBLICLY TESTABLE? (can anyone use the same evidence in the same way?)
- _____ _____ 6. Is the information MEASURABLE? (can the evidence be quantified in some way?)
- _____ _____ 7. Is the process REPEATABLE? (will the same evidence always lead to the same conclusion?)
- _____ _____ 8. If the conclusion is the only possible way to explain the evidence, then mark "T". If other (different) conclusions are possible, then write "PT" (Possibly True) AND "PF" (Possibly False) in the scoring spaces. Then go gather more information from other sources to help you to resolve these possibilities.