

Flow Chart to Determine Source Type

Is the source “credible” -- in the context of academic work¹?

Step 1: Consider these two questions:

- Question 1: What are the qualifications of the writer? 1) expert on this topic; 2) professional science writer; or 3) neither of these.
- Question 2: For whom was the source *primarily* written (audience)?: 1) experts; 2) educated laypersons; or 3) the general public.

Step 2: Choose the correct answer:

- Answer 1 (Credible): Written by an expert primarily for experts. If so, proceed to Column A.
- Answer 2 (Credible): Written by an expert/professional writer primarily for educated laypersons. If so, proceed to Column B.
- Answer 3 (NOT credible): All levels of expertise as writer, but intended audience is the general public. If so, proceed to Column C.

Column A: Expert/Credible	Column B: Educated laypersons/Credible	Column C: General public/NOT credible
<p><u>Academic book (characteristics):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports original work (compiled from years or decades of research) • In-text references are noted • The publisher of the book is an academic press or university press. • May/may not be an edited volume <p><u>Academic journal article (characteristics)²</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports original research • Printed in professional journal • Article was peer reviewed • Usually 5+ pages w/references. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic encyclopedias (e.g.; <i>Encyclopedia of anthropology</i>) • Academic social media including blogs/vlogs³ • Campus lectures/presentations • <i>CQ Researcher</i> • Government publications/websites (e.g.; <i>US Census Bureau</i>) • Guide books (e.g.; strategies for non-native English language students) • Non-governmental organizations (e.g.; <i>MercyCorps</i>) • Professional Interviews • Science magazines (e.g.; <i>Smithsonian, Natural History</i>) • Science/social science-focused documentaries (e.g.; <i>Nature, Secrets of the Dead</i>) • Symposia -- (e.g.; TED Talks) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochures/pamphlets • Commercial or personal websites • Diaries/letters/emails • How-to books (e.g.; how to crochet, cook, etc.) • Music recordings • Newspapers • Popular books • Popular encyclopedias (e.g.; <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i>) • Popular films • Popular magazines (e.g.; <i>National Geographic</i>) • Popular social media including blogs/vlogs • Popular T.V. or Internet shows • Text messages • YouTube.com and similar sites (exception: see Symposia under Column B) <p style="text-align: center;">Forbidden: Textbooks (they are secondary sources)</p>

¹ The term credible in this context is based on the common vocabulary used in academe and does not reflect on the reputation of the writer.

² Other journal entries -- such as book reviews, commentaries, or obituaries -- are aimed at expert audience and are credible, but rarely are used in term papers or literature reviews. I would place into Column B usually.

³ It can be difficult to distinguish social media considered academic from that generated for popular consumption. Check with your instructor if not sure.

Example: Sources on the Topic of Beer

	<u>Citation</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Column A	Olsson, S.R.. (1978), Kvass. In <i>Gastronomisk kalender</i> , pp. 94–115. Stockholm: J.W. Cappelens Antikvariat, Slependen.	This is a chapter in an edited book published by an academic press.	While this source is older and so should be evaluated with caution, your judgment can be used to determine if the content has become outdated.
Column B	Olsson, S. (2003) Beer: Origins and ancient history. In S. H. Katz & W. W. Weaver (Eds.). <i>Encyclopedia of food and culture</i> (Vol. 1, pp. 171-175). New York: Scribner.	This is an entry in an academic encyclopedia. Additional entries are included that are linked to the topic of beer. Each entry, in this case, is based on a specific time period.	Most of the entries are written by professional researchers in nutritional anthropology and there are citations from experts on the topic of beer.
Column C	Beyond Productions (Producer) & Discovery Communications (Director). (2011). <i>How beer saved the world</i> . [Motion Picture]. United States: Discovery - Gaiam.	“Did you know that Beer was critical to the birth of civilization? That's right - Beer. Scientists and historians line up to tell the amazing, untold story of how beer helped create maths, poetry, Pyramids, modern medicine, labor laws and America.” (quoted from: <i>Editorial reviews: How beer saved the world</i> . (2012). Retrieved from Amazon.com)	A wide range of experts was interviewed. Without careful evaluation of this source you might be “fooled” into thinking this is a credible source.