The Foundation of Authority:  
Questions to Consider When Evaluating a Source

You should look at the content of the source, but it is also important to evaluate the **author or creator** of a source.

When we talk about the credibility of a source, we are also talking about the **authority** of the people who created the source, their knowledge of the subject, the influence their opinions have among their peers, and their potential bias.

What is the **foundation of authority**? In order to determine if an author is a reliable source, think about these building blocks for constructing authority.

**Context:** What do you know about the author? Are they a professor or researcher? Do they hold a professional, social, or political position? Do they have special experience, like witnessing an event or working in an industry?

**Knowledge:** What do they know about the subject? Is the depth of their knowledge sufficient, or are there potential gaps in their understanding?

**Influence:** Authors usually have a community of peers. Who are they, and what do they have to say about the author? Is the author's work influential or frequently referenced?

**Bias:** Why might this author's opinion be more prominent than others? What about the author’s community, race, gender, economic or social position make them seem to be more of an authority over someone else? What are the consequences of the author's potential bias? Bias isn’t necessarily “bad.” What matters is how it affects the point of view of the source and the context of your question.

Authority can be found at the top of the pyramid, but there is always bias in their opinion. You may also find authority where you least expect it; it all depends on the context of your question.