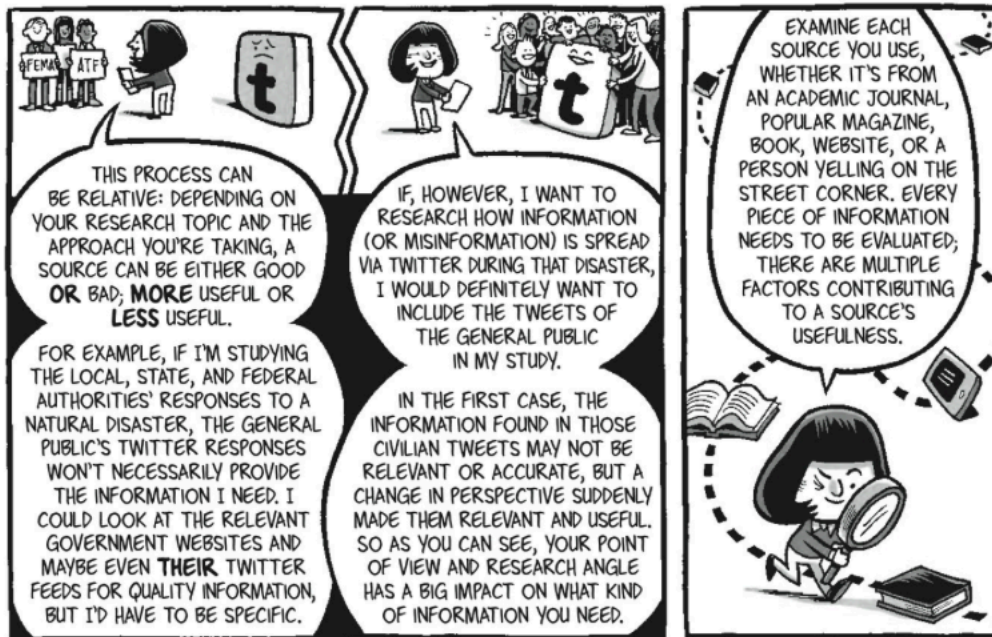
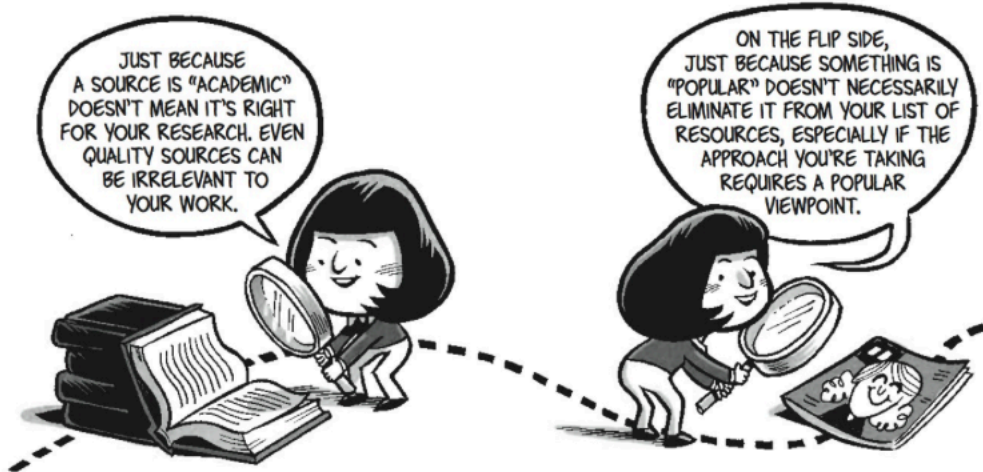


CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATING YOUR SOURCES





WHEN EVALUATING ANY INFORMATION IMMEDIATELY START ASKING QUESTIONS:

WE NEED TO KNOW WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INFORMATION SO THAT WE CAN DETERMINE, TO SOME DEGREE, WHETHER OR NOT IT'S TRUSTWORTHY:



- WHERE DID THE INFORMATION COME FROM?
- WHO PRODUCED IT, SPONSORED IT, AND/OR PUBLISHED IT?
- WHAT'S THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION?

- WHO'S THE AUTHOR?
- WHAT ORGANIZATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PUBLISHING IT (IN PRINT OR ONLINE)?
- DO THE AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER HAVE THE **AUTHORITY** TO PRODUCE INFORMATION ON A GIVEN TOPIC?



NO SINGLE QUESTION WILL FULLY DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT INFORMATION IS WORTH USING, BUT THEY CAN ALL CONTRIBUTE TO THE EVALUATION PROCESS.

DOES THE AUTHOR HAVE THE **EDUCATION, CREDENTIALS, AND EXPERTISE** NEEDED TO CREATE ACCURATE AND RELIABLE INFORMATION? DOES THEIR EXPERIENCE ALIGN WITH THE SUBJECT? WHY ARE THEY QUALIFIED TO WRITE ON **THIS** TOPIC?

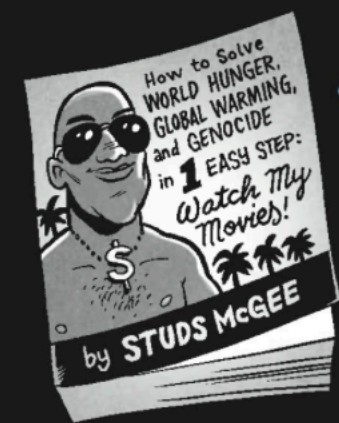


HMMM. SCIENCE IS FUN, BUT I THINK I'LL WRITE AN ARTICLE ABOUT PIRATES!



IF THERE'S INFORMATION OFFERED ABOUT THE AUTHOR WITHIN THE SOURCE ITSELF, SEE IF YOU CAN VERIFY IT, JUST TO MAKE SURE (YOU MIGHT START WITH A UNIVERSITY OR ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE). TRY TO LOCATE OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR.

DO THEY HAVE AN ESTABLISHED RECORD OF PUBLICATION ON THE TOPIC?



WHAT MAKES THE PUBLICATION OR WEBSITE RELIABLE, AS WELL?

- DOES IT HAVE A HISTORY OF BEING A RELIABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION?
- IS IT PEER-REVIEWED AND/OR ACADEMIC RESOURCE, OR IS IT MORE OF A POPULAR ITEM?
- THE TITLE OF THE RESOURCE MIGHT PROVIDE SOME CLUES, AS WOULD THE SPONSORS OR PUBLISHERS OF THE MATERIAL.



http://www.dinonslaught.com/about

DINONSLAUGHT

About:
We're here to establish the truth about the return of the Dinosaur army to reclaim their planet.

ANYTIME YOU EVALUATE INFORMATION FROM A WEBSITE, YOU'LL NEED TO VERIFY THE ORGANIZATION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONTENT. IF IT'S NOT AN OFFICIAL ACADEMIC OR GOVERNMENT PAGE, SEE IF YOU CAN FIND A LINK LABELED "ABOUT" SOMEWHERE ON THE PAGE (USUALLY TOP OR BOTTOM). THAT LINK SHOULD PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION. YOU'LL OFTEN FIND THAT ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A BIAS AND MAY BE DEVOTED TO A CAUSE OTHER THAN CONDUCTING RESEARCH. SO THEY MAY NOT PRODUCE THE OBJECTIVE, SCHOLARLY INFORMATION THAT YOU NEED FOR YOUR WORK.

YOU CAN ALSO GOOGLE AN ORGANIZATION TO SEE IF THEY'VE BEEN IDENTIFIED BY OTHERS AS PRODUCING OR SHARING BIASED OR INACCURATE INFORMATION.

THE GOAL IS TO ESTABLISH THAT THE AUTHOR AND/OR THE PUBLISHER HAS THE BACKGROUND NECESSARY TO CREATE QUALITY INFORMATION. YOU WOULDN'T TRUST JUST ANYONE TO WORK ON YOUR CAR OR PROVIDE HEALTH CARE SERVICES...YOU WANT A PROFESSIONAL IN YOUR SPECIFIC AREA OF NEED.

JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE IS A "PROFESSIONAL" OR AN "EXPERT" DOESN'T MEAN THAT THEY ARE QUALIFIED TO DO ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING.

MAKE SURE THE INFORMATION YOU USE IS PRODUCED BY SOMEONE EXPERIENCED IN THE DISCIPLINE ON WHICH THEY'RE WRITING, AND THAT THE WEBSITE OR PUBLICATION HAS A HISTORY OF RELIABILITY.

WOW, NO MORE VACCINES FOR MY KIDS! TOO MANY UNKNOWNNS!

WHAT A BUNCH OF TRASH. THEIR RESEARCH IS COMPLETELY FLAWED AND TOO EMOTIONAL! KEEP EMOTION OUT OF YOUR RESEARCH!

NO MORE SHOTS. PLEASE.

HMMM, THE AUTHOR MADE SOME INTERESTING POINTS BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT I THINK. I SHOULD INVESTIGATE A BIT MORE. MAYBE I CAN FIND SOME OTHER VIEWPOINTS BEFORE I MAKE MY OWN DECISIONS.

NOW, NONE OF THIS IS ABSOLUTE. THE NOTION OF **AUTHORITY** IS CONSTRUCTED AND CONTEXTUAL.* THAT MEANS WE BUILD OUR OWN SYSTEMS FOR UNDERSTANDING WHO AND WHAT TO BELIEVE, BUT THESE SYSTEMS ARE BUILT UPON OUR OWN EXPERIENCES, PREJUDICES, AND INTERACTION WITH OTHER EXISTING SYSTEMS. EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US GIVES **PREFERENCE** TO CERTAIN TYPES OF INFORMATION, AND THIS CAN PREVENT US FROM GAINING VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE THAT WOULD ALLOW US TO EXPAND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT CONSTITUTES **GOOD INFORMATION**.

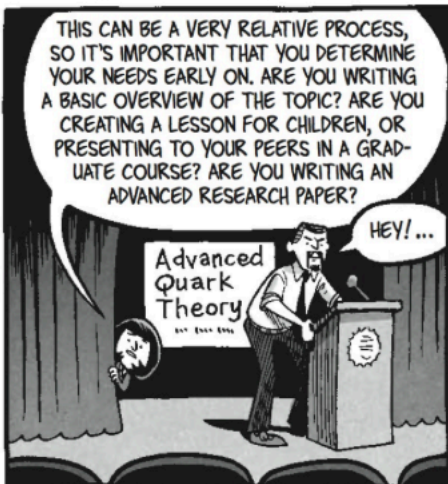
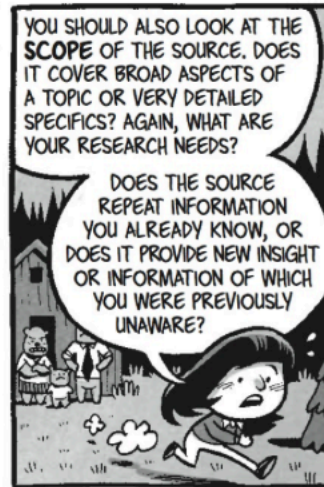
THIS IS GETTING DEEP, BUT WHAT IT BOILS DOWN TO IS THAT YOU SHOULD RETAIN A HEALTHY MEASURE OF SKEPTICISM WHEN EVALUATING ANY RESOURCE. YOU SHOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT AND USE A WIDE VARIETY OF CONTENT PRODUCED BY A DIVERSE RANGE OF AUTHORS, BUT ALWAYS ASK YOURSELF WHY ONE PIECE OF INFORMATION IS MORE USEFUL THAN ANOTHER AND WHY A PARTICULAR AUTHOR SHOULD BE TRUSTED.

*SEE L. TOWNSEND, K. BRUNETTI, AND A. R. HOFER, "THRESHOLD CONCEPTS AND INFORMATION LITERACY," PORTAL: LIBRARIES AND THE ACADEMY 11, NO. 3 (2011): 853-69; AND THE ACRL DRAFT FRAMEWORK FOR INFORMATION LITERACY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, AT acr1.lala.org/ilstandards/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Framework-for-IL-for-HE-Draft-1-Part-2.pdf.



KNOWING A SOURCE'S TARGET AUDIENCE HELPS DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THE SOURCE WILL BE APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR RESEARCH. OBVIOUSLY, AN ARTICLE FROM THE JOURNAL OF ASTROPHYSICS IS GOING TO HAVE A PARTICULAR AUDIENCE IN MIND, SO PAY ATTENTION TO THE TITLES OF THE PUBLICATION OR WEBSITE.

ACADEMIC SOURCES ARE AIMED AT AUDIENCES KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT SPECIFIC TOPICS, AND POPULAR SOURCES ARE AIMED AT AN AUDIENCE THAT MAY HAVE NO SUCH PRIOR KNOWLEDGE. FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH, YOU PROBABLY WANT TO USE AN ACADEMIC SOURCE, BUT EVEN THOSE CAN HAVE VARYING AUDIENCES IN MIND.



NOW, EVEN MORE QUESTIONS: WHY WAS THIS INFORMATION CREATED? HOW DOES THE AUTHOR HOPE TO **IMPACT** THE AUDIENCE? WHAT'S THE PURPOSE? YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS SO YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THE AUTHOR IS APPROACHING THE TOPIC. THE PURPOSE OF A SOURCE CAN CHANGE HOW WE VIEW AND USE IT.

000 <http://www.marsden4mayor.com>

MARSDEN 4MAYOR

Let me explain why I'm right and my opponent is wrong without really answering your question or addressing the issue.

Click here for FREE BUMPER STICKER!

SOMETIMES, INFORMATION IS MEANT TO PERSUADE OR CONVINCE THE AUDIENCE OF SOMETHING. THIS APPROACH IS NOT **GUARANTEED** TO BE UNTRUSTWORTHY, BUT BE CAREFUL WHEN AN AUTHOR CLEARLY TAKES A SIDE ON A TOPIC. MAKE SURE THAT ANY OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS ARE ACKNOWLEDGED AND SATISFACTORILY ADDRESSED BEFORE YOU CONSIDER USING A PERSUASIVE SOURCE IN YOUR RESEARCH.

SOMETIMES INFORMATION IS INTENDED TO SELL THE AUDIENCE SOMETHING. SOMETIMES IT'S OBVIOUS, BUT OFTEN THE AUTHORS ATTEMPT TO HIDE THEIR INTENTIONS OR PROVIDE MISLEADING, EVEN FALSE STATISTICS TO HELP SEAL THE DEAL.

According to recent research, owning an Icarus Sunflare increases your attractiveness by 19%, 46%, your job success by 19%, and your debt by 174%.*

*Results provided by Daedalus Innovations, a parent company of Icarus Automobiles, but don't worry, just go with it.

INFORMATION DESIGNED FOR ENTERTAINMENT OR SATIRE IS OFTEN FULL OF FALSE STATEMENTS AND IMAGINARY "FACTS," BUT IT IS SOMETIMES DISGUISED AS ACTUAL NEWS OR SCHOLARLY INFORMATION. DON'T MISTAKE SATIRE FOR REALITY!

THE NOT (NRN) REAL NEWS

Congress Begins Third Hibernation of the Year: Senator Marcus (D-OR) Gains 45 Pounds to "Keep Me Satisfied Until the Next Session."

AND, OF COURSE, INFORMATION CAN BE USED TO... **INFORM**. OBJECTIVE, UNBIASED, FACTUAL INFORMATION USED TO EDUCATE. YEP, IT CAN BE THAT SIMPLE.*

YOU'LL NORMALLY FOCUS ON THIS TYPE OF INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS, BUT REMEMBER THIS CAN DEPEND ON WHAT YOU'RE RESEARCHING AND HOW YOU CHOOSE TO APPROACH THE TOPIC.

the **JOURNAL** of STRAIGHTFORWARD INFORMATION

*HOWEVER, YOU CAN ALMOST ALWAYS FIND SOMETHING TO COMPLAIN ABOUT WITH ANY SOURCE, SO REMEMBER THAT OBJECTIVITY IS SOMETIMES JUST A BEST EFFORT.

NEXT, DETERMINE IF THE INFORMATION IS ACCURATE AND RELIABLE.

IS IT OF HIGH QUALITY? IS IT OBJECTIVE?

~~FATCS~~ ~~FACTS~~

FACTS

BOTTOM LINE, IF THE FACTS AREN'T CORRECT OR COMPLETE, THEY DON'T NEED TO BE USED IN YOUR RESEARCH, OR THOSE FLAWS NEED TO BE HIGHLIGHTED IN ORDER TO PREVENT CONFUSION.

EVALUATING THE FACTUAL CONTENT OF A SOURCE CAN BE DIFFICULT IF YOU'RE NOT AN EXPERT IN THE TOPIC. STILL, THERE ARE WAYS TO FIGURE OUT IF A SOURCE IS GENERALLY RELIABLE.

IF AN ARTICLE OR ONLINE PUBLICATION HAS GONE THROUGH THE PEER-REVIEW PROCESS, IT'S PROBABLY PRETTY ACCURATE AND RELIABLE, SINCE MULTIPLE EXPERTS SHOULD HAVE ALREADY EVALUATED IT. LIKEWISE, IF A SOURCE HAS BEEN PRODUCED BY AN ACADEMIC PUBLISHER, IT IS PROBABLY CREDIBLE. OF COURSE, REVIEWERS CAN BE SUBJECT TO BIAS, PERSONAL ISSUES, AND MISTAKES, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER HUMAN.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CHECK THE FACTS AGAINST ANOTHER RESOURCE AND SEE IF THEY MATCH UP.

NICE JOB.

YEP, IT LOOKS GREAT TO ME.

MOST OF IT LOOKS FINE, BUT I WOULD SUGGEST DOUBLE-CHECKING THE FACTS ON PAGE 78...

CITATIONS AND REFERENCES PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN EVALUATING A SOURCE. DOES THE AUTHOR PROVIDE A LIST OF SOURCES USED IN THEIR RESEARCH? DO THEY EXPLAIN WHICH SOURCES PROVIDED SPECIFIC QUOTES AND FACTS? YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO TRACK DOWN THEIR SOURCES AND VERIFY THAT THE AUTHOR HAS USED THEM CORRECTLY, RETRACING THEIR RESEARCH "FOOTSTEPS" TO SEE HOW THEY REACHED THEIR CONCLUSIONS.

VERIFIABLE RESEARCH

CITATION

CITATION

CITATION

CITATION

CITATION

CITATION

YOU MIGHT ALSO NOTE IF YOUR SOURCE HAS BEEN CITED IN OTHER SOURCES. IF IT KEEPS POPPING UP IN OTHER REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES, THAT'S A GOOD SIGN OF RELIABILITY.

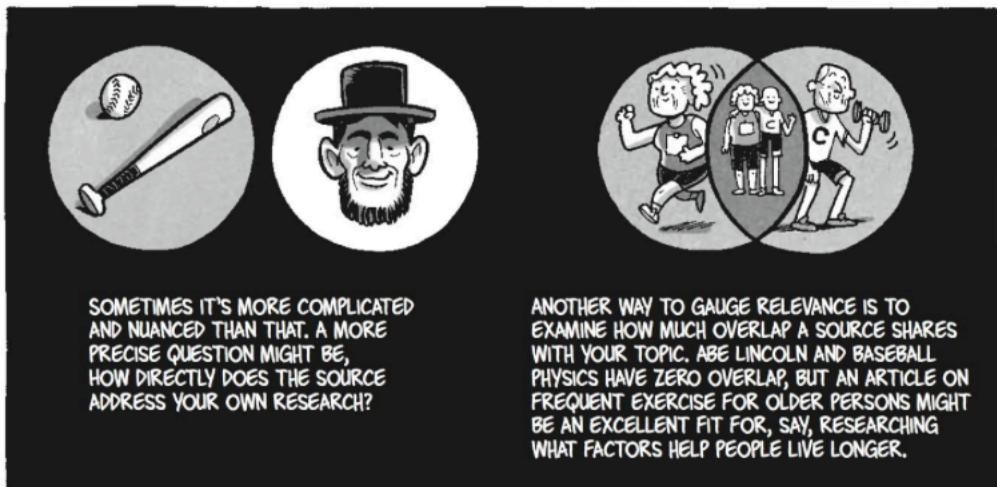
YOU'LL ALSO NEED TO LOOK AT **OBJECTIVITY**: WHETHER OR NOT THE RESOURCE IS BALANCED AND IMPARTIAL.

IS THE CONTENT BIASED, ONE-SIDED, OR HEAVY ON OPINION? IF SO, BE CAUTIOUS. THOSE TYPES OF SOURCES ARE MORE LIKELY TO OMIT OR EVEN ALTER FACTS TO MAKE A POINT.

AVOID SOURCES THAT DON'T GIVE AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF **BOTH** SIDES OF AN ISSUE BEFORE THEY TAKE A POSITION, AND BE WARY OF SOURCES USING HIGHLY EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE. IF YOU'RE UNCERTAIN ABOUT A SOURCE, FIND OUT WHO FUNDED OR SPONSORED THEIR RESEARCH, SINCE THAT CAN BE AN INDICATION OF BIAS.

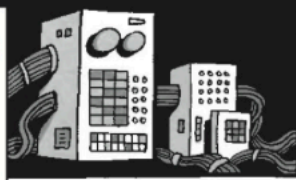
"How Secondhand Cigarette Smoking Can Improve the Marathon Running Abilities of Sedentary 50-Year-Old Males"

Funded by Carcino Tobacco Company



↑ SURGERY VS. SURGERY ↓

YOU SHOULD ALSO CHECK THE SOURCE'S **CURRENCY**: HOW RECENTLY IT WAS CREATED OR UPDATED. IN MANY CASES, YOU WANT INFORMATION AS CURRENT AS POSSIBLE, SINCE SUCH SOURCES LIKELY INCLUDE THE MOST UP-TO-DATE RESEARCH. THIS IS ESPECIALLY VITAL TO RESEARCH ON TECHNOLOGY, MEDICINE, OR OTHER RAPIDLY CHANGING FIELDS, BUT MAY NOT MATTER AS MUCH WHEN STUDYING CERTAIN HISTORICAL TOPICS.



↑ COMPUTER VS. COMPUTER ↓



ALWAYS CHECK TO SEE IF YOUR SOURCE IS DATED AND THEN DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT IT MATTERS BY LOOKING AT OTHER SOURCES ON THE SAME TOPIC. SEE IF RECENT MATERIALS HAVE RENDERED THE OLD STUFF OBSOLETE.



CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

REMEMBER TO USE YOUR ONLINE TOOL TO RECORD
YOUR RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS.

1. Locate at least one book, one scholarly article, and one web resource relevant to your topic. Evaluate each resource by examining the author/creator, intended audience, purpose, accuracy, currency, objectivity, and relevance. How does the process of evaluating sources help you determine whether or not to use a source in your research?
2. What kind of "information bias" do you have? Are you more likely to access, consume, and believe content made available through certain media? Do your preferences change depending on your information need? How so? Is there a particular author, website, show, or other media that you are unwilling or uncomfortable dealing with? Identify some types of information you knowingly avoid and attempt to assess why you feel a certain way about that info. Take time to evaluate the source(s) and try to imagine possible scenarios in which that particular information would be relevant to someone. Do you feel that your preferences are justified, or have you discovered new potential sources of useful information?
3. How do you feel about using information that you find through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media in your own research? Remember that even though you might initially locate information through social media, you could actually be sent to another site through a link to actually access the content. How could you determine the authority of an author who posts something online through social media?
4. Find a resource on your topic that you would not use in your research. Explain why you would avoid it, using the criteria noted above.
5. Find an academic journal article on your topic, as well as one from a popular magazine, newspaper, or website. Compare the two. How do they differ in terms of language, length, content, citation, and authority? How do these differences affect the potential use of the articles?
6. Is your research topic dependent on the most up-to-date information and research? Why or why not?
7. Examine a satirical news site like the *Onion*, the *Daily Current*, or the *Duffel Blog*. What is the purpose of websites like these? Would you use these sites for a research project? Why or why not? What clues help you determine if the information is accurate or not?