

Analyzing a Source:

One of the most important aspects of conducting research is finding reliable, relevant source material. Although source material may be plentiful, it is vital to remember **quality over quantity**. Below are some tips on critically analyzing a source to determine relevance, reputability, and reliability of the material.

Questions to Ask

<p>Bias:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the author(s) of this source? Do they have any stake in the conclusions drawn from this research? • Is this research funded by a particular group? (Political organization, think tank, etc.) • What else have the authors done in their career that could have contributed to bias?
<p>Reputability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the author? Do they specialize in any particular field? What else have they done in their career? • Who published the piece? Is this an Op-Ed? If a journal article, what reputation does the journal have?
<p>Audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the intended audience for this source? (General, popular, academic) • What is the intended impact of this work? (Convince, inform, refute)
<p>Historical Context (Similar to Bias):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and where was this written? (Example: Was this written in the US South during the Jim Crow era? How does that affect the meaning of this source?) • What new information has come out since that may render this source inaccurate? • What was the political environment when this was published? Was this written in a time where there was free press or was there reason to be careful with what views were expressed? (EX: Cold War America, Cultural Revolution in China. These two examples could have an effect on what is written and how information is presented.)

Below is an example:

Source: Eulau, Heinz. "Religion and Power." *The Antioch Review* 5, no. 2 (1945): 250-59.
Accessed May 25, 2021. doi:10.2307/4609079.

<p>Bias:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author: Heinz Eulau. Worked in academia and at DOJ. • Academic research published in <i>Antioch Review</i>. • Born in Germany in 1915, immigrated to US in 1935. • <i>Conclusion: Author does not have any outright bias. May have some bias toward US due to the historical time period and proximity to WW2. Not relevant to this particular article.</i>



Investigating Religion & Power

Reputability:

- Heinz Eulau was a scholar who focused in legislative research. Primarily a political science.
- Journal article published in Antioch Review. Literary magazine associated with Antioch College. Reputable journal published by academic institution.
- *Conclusion: This article is peer reviewed by a reputable institution and can be considered generally reliable. However, theology is not what Eulau is best known for and not his particular focus. We can assume this affects the extent that he writes about the connection between religion and politics.*

Audience:

- Academic audience.
- Eulau seeks to prove the argument that it is difficult to separate religious organizations and political movements
- Purpose: To convince an academic audience of his argument. Does not seek to create any tangible call to action.
- *Conclusion: Eulau is writing for an academic audience and we can assume that this work is not biased in the manner that he is not seeking to push forward any particular agenda.*

Historical Context (Similar to Bias):

- Written in 1945 from a German immigrant. WW2 and WW1 to an extent fresh in the mind of the author.
- Written in America, no outright reason to fear for safety or censor opinions.
- Discusses in article the relationship between the Holocaust and the Catholic Church. Failure of Catholic Church to quickly condemn Naziism at the front of the conversation.
- *Conclusion: The author is writing in a tumultuous time period directly after the Holocaust so the memory of Nazi Germany and the Catholic response is fresh in his mind. His view of the situation is heightened by his proximity to Germany personally. We can assume or predict that this a topic the Author will be passionate about and connect with on more than just a purely academic level. Ensure to read for this in the research and note any information that may later have proved to be inaccurate or disproved. (In this source there did appear to be any)*

Some of the above questions are from the below source. This book is a great resource for further review of critical analysis:

Pojmann, Wendy A., Barbara Reeves-Ellington, and Karen Ward Mahar. "Chapter Five: Ensuring a Successful Research Outcome Workbook Exercises." Essay. In *Doing History an Introduction to the Historian's Craft: with Workbook Activities*, 203–19. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

On the next page is a blank template to guide analysis:



Bias:

Author and Publication Reputability:

Audience & Purpose:

Historical Context:

