

# First-year Student Source Evaluation: Methods, Misunderstandings, and Madness

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## Background

- ❖ IRB exempt research conducted in Fall 2021 with six first-year composition sections.
- ❖ Coded open-ended responses.
- ❖ Sample size: Activity 1 = 74 responses, Activity 2 = 37 responses.
- ❖ In Activity 1, students were asked to evaluate sources provided to them, including a peer-reviewed article, a news article, a Wikipedia page, a webpage from a non-profit site, and a transcript of a podcast (see digital handout).
- ❖ In Activity 2, students searched for their own sources to evaluate.

## Research Questions

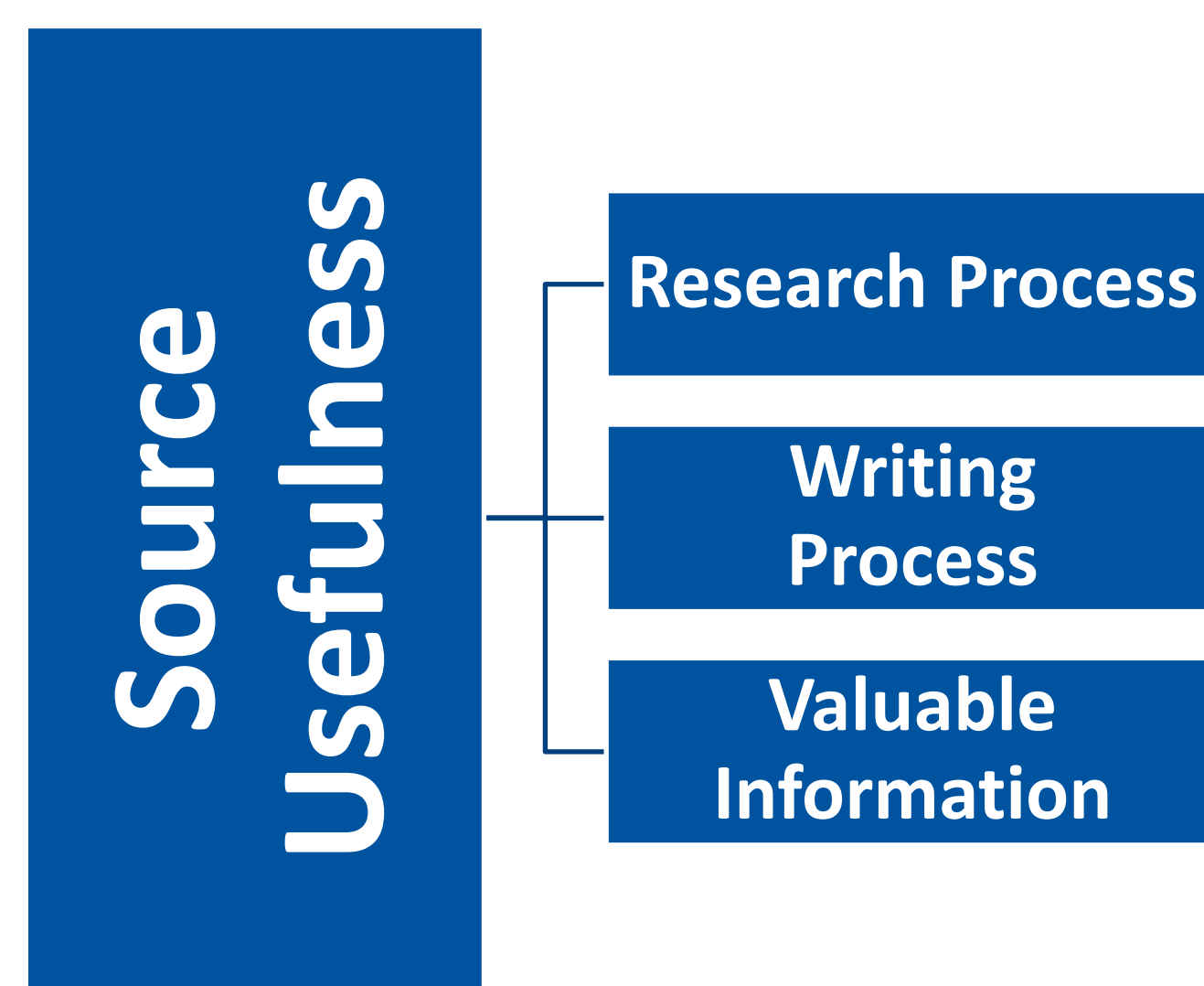
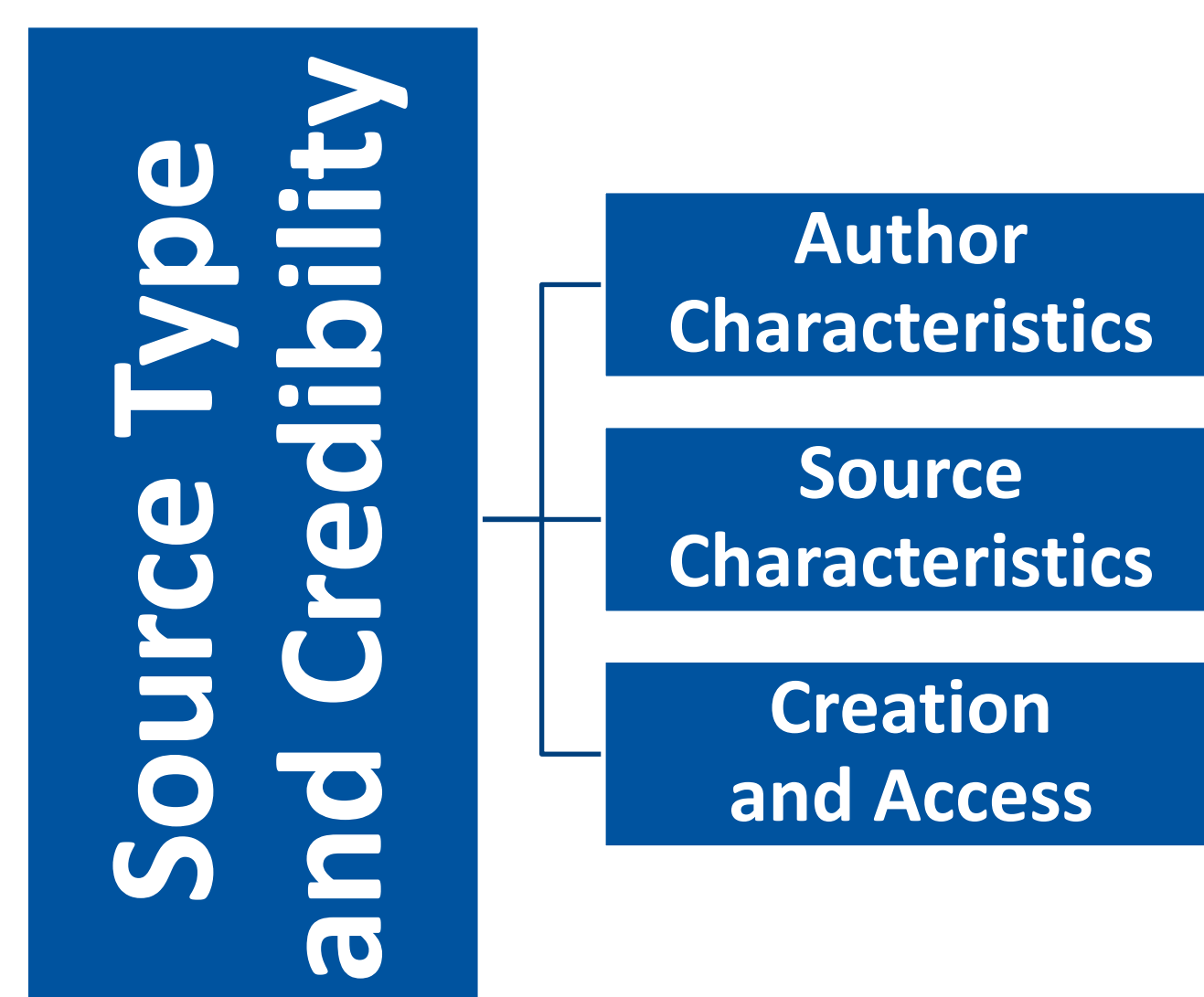


How do students describe the type of source they are using?



What criteria do students apply when evaluating usefulness and credibility of scholarly and popular sources?

## Coding Categories



## Major Findings

### Source Types

- ❖ Students successfully used surface-level indicators to identify source types. Some of the most common indicators were identifying the entity responsible for the content and using the packaging or formatting to determine the source type.
- ❖ These strategies were useful for traditional source types but less useful for multimedia content. This also led to mistaken assumptions about other source. It also led to assumptions about the intent and audience of less common source types.

“It’s a harvard.edu article.”

“In the top left corner of the page there was a brief label that stated ‘review.’ So, I assumed it was a peer-reviewed journal.”

“The length, the structure and how it seems to be conducted in an experiment type of style.”

“It is published by CNN which I know is a news outlet.”



### Usefulness

- ❖ In both activities and for all source types, the majority of students identified usefulness in vague terms as a way to increase understanding of a topic. Few of them could articulate how the sources could be incorporated into a paper or project.
- ❖ Students have difficulty translating the usefulness to a specific reason, which is shown in the vague expression of usefulness and the lack of second step.

“This source can give some background information and a broad overview of the topic that someone would research.”

“...The article references where the author found all of the different statistics with these sources sometimes hyper-linked, thus the article would help in finding other resources to reference in a research paper.”

“This source could be useful for an E110 research project by providing a brief overview of the topic, by providing sources to visit for further research, and by inspiring further research that the student can embark on.”



### Credibility

- ❖ Students used different methods to identify credibility based on the type of source they were evaluating.
- ❖ Scholarly sources - Students tended to rely on the presence of an author or multiple authors and their credentials to determine credibility. The common misunderstandings included equating information found in a database as scholarly and that scholarly information was always better than other source types.
- ❖ News sources - Students used quotations and in-text sources to evaluate credibility. However, many of them also wrote that news sources were often biased.
- ❖ All sources - Students often looked for citations to indicate credibility, even in websites and multimedia sources. They also indicated that the presence of data indicated credibility without further evaluation of that data.

“I can tell it came from some type of database of articles, which is usually an indicator that it was reviewed and good enough to publish.”

“CNN is considered to be biased, but this article did not seem to have a particular bias.”

“Statistics brought up. Evidence mentioned.”



## Ask Us

- What are some ways to move beyond checklist-based source evaluation instruction?
- What are some examples of students’ struggles to evaluate sources?
- How did students address perceptions of bias?
- What are possible opportunities for teaching and future research?

## Digital Handout



## Contact

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