***\*\*Adapted from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center’s webpage\*\****

**Evaluating Authority**

Very few of us routinely evaluate the authority of citations in texts we are reading. Indeed, very few of us ever even look up any of the citations in texts we´re reading. But perhaps we should. Critical readers and writers are skeptical; they don´t trust easily. Unless we examine and evaluate the authority of sources, how can we know that we can trust the writer we´re reading? And how can we use a source in our own writing until we´ve determined that it is reliable?

Locating and examining sources cited in texts can give us valuable practice in developing a skeptical habit of mind, as well as prepare us to evaluate sources for use in our own writing. This is precisely what the following prompt asks you to do.

Here is the prompt:

1. Identify a text that draws on multiple sources. Make sure you are interested in the topic, because you will be learning more about it!
2. Choose two sources cited in the text to examine. These could be articles, research studies, census data, etc. Make sure to choose short texts & not huge sources like whole books, so this exercise remains manageable.
3. Now, evaluate the authority of each source. Ask these questions:
* Who is the author(s) of the source? What do these people have at stake? Are they authorities?
* Where did the source appear? Is the source’s forum or the publication associated with trustworthy information? Does it have mechanisms for assuring quality research? (Peer review for journals, for instance, or professional standards for published studies.)
* Does the source support the primary text? How so?
* Is there anything you found confusing in trying to answer the above questions, or anything interesting worth mentioning about the sources?
1. Write 5-6 sentences describing what you found (2-3 for each source).

-from Chris Gallagher and Amy Lee´s *Claiming Writing: Teaching in an Age of Testing* (forthcoming, Scholastic Publishers)