**When Is Someone an Authority?**

Last week, we learned a simple approach to sorting and labeling sources of information, called The WHY Method. Today, we’ll look at just the first question in The WHY Method a little more closely—Who is the author? Here’s the list of Author Identity descriptions again:

* **Anonymous** – No one takes credit, or labeled as “anonymous”
* **Nonprofessional** – The author has no demonstrated expertise
* **Corporate Author** – No named authors; a corporation or organization is responsible
* **Academic-amateur** – The author has a graduate degree in another field, but is an amateur in this field
* **Professional or Journalist** – The author has significant professional expertise in this field, or else a degree and/or a year’s experience as a working journalist
* **Academic** – The author has a graduate degree (M.S.W., J.D., Ph.D., etc.) in this field

Now, let’s imagine you’ve found six sources whose authors match these categories—

* **HoopsRMyLyfe** – An anonymous writer who uses this nickname/pseudonym to write about basketball
* **Chris Lee** – Chris has no college degree, and writes about basketball (but not for magazines/news sites)
* **Basketball Central** – An organization that posts articles about basketball without listing specific authors
* **Dr. Jordan Brown** – Jordan has a Ph.D. in Biology, but has a long history of writing about basketball for fun
* **Avery Deng** - Avery was an All-American point guard in college, and has coached basketball for years
* **Dr. Alex Garcia** – Alex has a Ph.D. in sports history, and teaches that subject at a major university

We know that just knowing an author’s credentials isn’t the end of the story. We would want to know how their work was reviewed and why it was being published in order to reach a better understanding of how trustworthy it might be. But for today’s lesson, we’ll ignore those elements in order to focus on Author Identity.

Let’s start with the following exercise: imagine that you’ve been asked to write an opinion piece for your school newspaper on whether or not LeBron James is the greatest basketball player of all time. Which of the above authors would you trust enough as an authority to rely on their ideas for your opinion piece? Check the appropriate boxes.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author** | **I would rely on them** | **I am not sure if I would rely on them** | **I would not rely on them** |
| HoopsRMyLyfe |  |  |  |
| Chris Lee |  |  |  |
| Basketball Central |  |  |  |
| Dr. Jordan Brown |  |  |  |
| Avery Deng |  |  |  |
| Dr. Alex Garcia |  |  |  |

Here’s a new question: imagine that you’ve been asked to write a research paper for your English class on the question of whether or not college athletes should be paid for their performance. Which of the above authors would you trust enough as an authority to rely on their ideas for your research paper? Check the appropriate boxes.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author** | **I would rely on them** | **I am not sure if I would rely on them** | **I would not rely on them** |
| HoopsRMyLyfe |  |  |  |
| Chris Lee |  |  |  |
| Basketball Central |  |  |  |
| Dr. Jordan Brown |  |  |  |
| Avery Deng |  |  |  |
| Dr. Alex Garcia |  |  |  |

Turn over this page for the last step in this assignment.

**When is Someone an Authority?** Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please put your name above and, on the page below, write your answers to the following questions:

1. Who do you think of as the most trustworthy source in the list? Why do you trust them on these topics?
2. Who do you think of as the least trustworthy source in the list? What makes you unwilling to trust them on these topics?
3. If you are unsure about any of the authors, on either topic, what makes you feel unsure about them? What information would you need to learn about them to become sure about how trustworthy they are?
4. Look back at your answers on the other side of this page—how much did your answers change between the two charts? Whether they changed or stayed the same, explain here why you think that was the case for you.