

THE PROOF IS THE POINT.



NEON FOOTNOTE

An illustrated field manual for making expressive claims, checking sources, explaining uncertainty and keeping the reference visible.

01 / THE ARGUMENT

MAKE THE FOOTNOTE LOUDER

A citation is not a decorative flourish. It is a route that lets readers examine whether the visual claim deserves their confidence.

THE PROPOSITION

Underground visual culture thrives on compression, exaggeration, surprise and attitude. Scholarly practice asks different questions: What is being claimed? What has been observed? Which source would let another reader check it? Those traditions are not enemies. A visually assertive work can invite scrutiny rather than evade it.

THE DISTINCTION

A beautiful poster can motivate someone to look. It cannot, on its own, establish a causal relationship or verify a historical statement. Research papers, policy guidance, firsthand accounts and artworks have different evidentiary roles. None should be silently substituted for another.

DESIGN

Attract the eye

EVIDENCE

Ground the claim

JUDGMENT

Stay revisable

READ THIS GUIDE AS A PRACTICE, NOT A SCORING SYSTEM

The exercises are editorial tools, not a validated test of intelligence, credibility or scholarly aptitude. Use domain-specific methods when higher-stakes claims require them.

02 / DISASSEMBLY

WHAT A CLAIM IS MADE OF

Before a sentence deserves a citation, learn where its confidence comes from.

01 THE ASSERTION

What exactly is said to be true? Replace slogans with the smallest proposition that could be tested.

02 THE SCOPE

Who, where, when and under which conditions? Absolutes such as “always” or “everyone” need especially strong support.

03 THE SOURCE

Which traceable item contains the relevant observation, analysis or reasoning? A publication title alone is not the evidence.

04 THE INFERENCE

What reasoning connects source and assertion? Even accurate source quotations can be stretched beyond their intended meaning.

05 THE CAVEAT

What has not been tested? What other explanation remains plausible? A caveat is often the most intellectually interesting part.

DESIGN RULE

Visual hierarchy may amplify a sentence, but it should never hide the scope, source or caveat. Keep these parts discoverable in the same reading journey.

03 / PROVENANCE LABELS

FOUR LABELS. FOUR DIFFERENT JOBS.

Do not make readers guess which parts of an artwork are documented and which parts are imaginative.

EVIDENCE

A verifiable source makes a claim or reports a method or observation. Report its limits rather than treating it as a magic stamp.

INTERPRETATION

An author offers a reading of the evidence. State that it is an argument: others may interpret the same record differently.

HYPOTHESIS

A proposed explanation or prediction awaits further examination. It is not yet a confirmed result.

FICTION / SATIRE

Invented scenarios can teach or provoke. Clearly identify the invented status before readers mistake it for a report.

AN EXAMPLE

“Footnotes make design more trustworthy” is a plausible interpretation or hypothesis until the term “trustworthy” is defined and empirically tested in a suitable context. “Crossref recommends displaying DOI links as full URLs” is a documentary claim supported by Crossref guidance [3].

WATCH FOR CATEGORY ERRORS

A citation to a standard is evidence about what the standard says; it is not automatically evidence that following the standard produces a particular psychological effect.

04 / AUTHORITY

DON'T WORSHIP A NAMEPLATE.

The right source depends on the question. Prestige is not an argument.

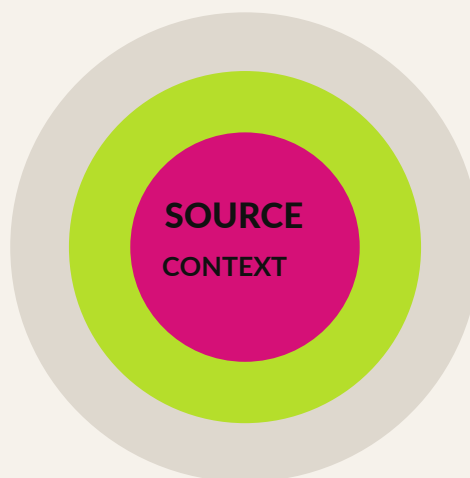
THE ACRL STARTING POINT

The Association of College & Research Libraries describes authority as constructed and contextual in its Framework for Information Literacy [1]. Expertise is real, but its relevance varies across disciplines, questions and communities.

ASK INSTEAD

What does this author or institution know about this particular claim? Is the source a primary record, a synthesis, a personal account, a technical standard or a promotional page? What do alternative qualified sources say?

QUESTION



FIELD

AN EDITORIAL TRICK

Next to every citation, write one sentence explaining why this source is suitable for this exact statement. If the sentence is difficult to write, the match may need further checking.

05 / SOURCE WALK

LEAVE THE LANDING PAGE.

A convincing design and a top-ranked result do not relieve the reader of source evaluation.

THE RESEARCH ANCHOR

McGrew, Breakstone, Ortega, Smith and Wineburg examined how students evaluated online sources in assessments of civic online reasoning [2]. The study concerns a particular assessment context. It does not justify treating every student or internet user as equally skilled or unskilled.

STEP 1 Name the checkable claim

STEP 2 Identify the actual publisher

STEP 3 Find the original context and date

STEP 4 Compare independent information

STEP 5 Return with a narrower conclusion

THIS IS AN EDITORIAL WORKFLOW

The five-step source walk is an original teaching simplification consistent with source-evaluation concerns in the cited research. It should not be mistaken for the exact intervention tested in the paper.

06 / CITATION INFRASTRUCTURE

A DOI IS A DOOR, NOT A VERDICT.

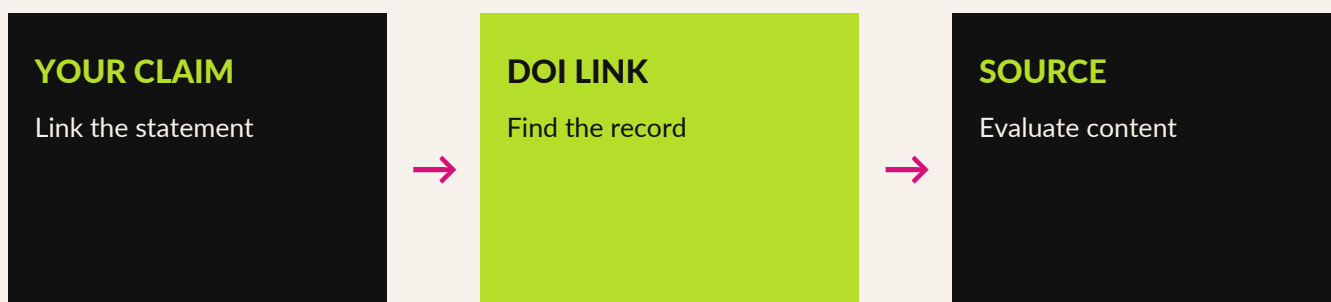
The link should help a reader locate a work. Its mere existence does not validate the argument inside.

CROSSREF GUIDANCE

Crossref advises displaying DOI links as full HTTPS URLs such as <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/xxxxx>, making them recognisable and copyable [3]. This is infrastructure guidance: it helps with navigation and reliable identification of research objects.

WHAT A DOI DOES NOT GUARANTEE

A DOI does not mean a study is correct, independently replicated, free to read or relevant to your claim. A reader still needs to inspect the work, its publication context, methods, and limitations.



COPY-PASTE RULE

A reference line should offer enough bibliographic detail to know what was cited and a stable route to find it. Do not replace both with “studies say”.

07 / DESIGN CONSTRAINTS

NEON, BUT MAKE IT LEGIBLE.

The same source trail should work without animation, precision pointing or perfect colour vision.

THE REFERENCE

WCAG 2.2 guidance includes requirements addressing keyboard focus visibility and whether focused elements are obscured [4]. Follow the actual criteria when making conformance claims; a stylish page alone cannot certify its accessibility.

01 / KEYBOARD

Cards and controls should be reachable and operable with a keyboard.

02 / CONTRAST

Small copy should remain legible and controls distinguishable; do not use colour as the only signal.

03 / MOTION

A decorative transition should be skippable; honour reduced-motion preferences.

04 / TEXT

Give each visual experiment a readable prose equivalent.

PUBLISHING TEST

Try the page at 320px wide. Tab through every control. Turn off motion. Read the printed guide. If one route fails, the typography needs revision, not an excuse.

08 / ORIGINAL DESIGN FRAMEWORK

BUILD A CITATION SIGNAL SYSTEM.

A source need not be tiny: make evidence status visible without making the publication look like a legal disclaimer.

01 / PINK

THE CLAIM

The reader sees what is being asserted.

02 / LIME

THE SOURCE

A distinct link leads to evidence or documentation.

03 / BLACK

THE CAVEAT

The boundary of inference stays attached.

WARNING ABOUT COLOUR

The three-colour system above is original art direction, not a recognised scientific notation. Keep labels in text as well as colour, and adapt to print or low-vision contexts.

EDITORIAL QUESTION

Could a reader point to the exact source, explain the claim's limits and distinguish the creator's opinion? If not, the neon is doing too much of the talking.

09 / FICTIONAL DEMONSTRATION

THE MIDNIGHT POSTER CASE.

The following example is invented for teaching. No study, sample, poster campaign or measurement is being reported.



**ALL MIDNIGHT
POSTERS
CHANGE
MINDS.**

WHAT THE POSTER HIDES

“All” is a universal statement. “Change minds” implies an outcome and perhaps a causal mechanism. The fictional headline defines neither the audience nor the effect. It includes no observations, comparison, methods or source.

WHAT CAN BE PRESERVED

The expressive urgency and aesthetic personality can remain. Replacing the text with a narrower, explicitly open question allows the artwork to stay provocative without impersonating proof.

FICTIONAL REWRITE

“Can a midnight poster influence what an audience notices or believes? An interesting possibility. The effect would need to be studied rather than assumed.”

10 / PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

REPAIR THE SENTENCE.

Three before-and-after examples. The purpose is calibration, not bleaching the personality from writing.

EXAMPLE 01

BEFORE: “Experts prove that bold design convinces everyone.”

AFTER: “Bold design may catch attention; whether it changes an audience’s views depends on what was measured and in which context.”

The second line avoids an invented consensus and removes “everyone”.

EXAMPLE 02

BEFORE: “Having a DOI means this research is true.”

AFTER: “The DOI gives readers a persistent route to a research object; they must still evaluate the methods and conclusions.”

Crossref [3] addresses identifiers and linking, not universal validity.

EXAMPLE 03

BEFORE: “The source is prestigious, so the claim stands.”

AFTER: “The author has relevant expertise, but the claim should be evaluated against evidence appropriate to the question.”

This reflects the contextual-authority approach described by ACRL [1].

THE CORRECTION IS NOT A DEFEAT

A narrower claim is often stronger because it can actually be inspected. Responsible revision can coexist with confidence, style and humour.

11 / WORKSHEET

ONE CLAIM. FIVE CHECKS.

Use this page with a social post, a lecture slide, a zine, a research essay or your own draft.

01 / COPY THE EXACT CLAIM

Write one sentence. Preserve the original wording so you can compare.

02 / WHO IS SPEAKING?

Identify author, organisation, publication date and incentives where relevant.

03 / WHAT IS THE SOURCE?

Record the primary source or best available document. Add a stable link.

04 / WHAT DOES IT REALLY SUPPORT?

Write one sentence narrower than the original headline.

05 / WHAT IS STILL UNKNOWN?

Name one uncertainty, plausible alternative or contextual boundary.

12 / FIELD WORKSHEET

WRITE YOUR SOURCE CAPTION.

A caption should travel with its evidence status. When cropped or quoted, it should resist becoming misleading.

HEADLINE

A memorable sentence that readers can actually parse.

STATUS LABEL

Evidence / interpretation / hypothesis / fiction. Choose and explain.

SOURCE ROUTE

Author, title, date, direct URL or DOI when available.

LIMITATION

One thing the source does not establish.

EXPORT THE FULL CAPTION

Do not share only the striking first sentence when the attached limitation materially changes what readers would reasonably believe.

13 / READER REVIEW

LET SOMEBODY CHALLENGE IT.

A generous critic can help separate a compelling experience from a misleading one.

01

Can you tell me what I am claiming in one sentence?

02

Which part do you think is backed by a source?

03

Can you reach the original source in two clicks?

04

Have I overstated what the source establishes?

05

Could the same evidence support another reading?

06

Does the design hide caveats on mobile or in print?

07

What would persuade you that my claim is wrong?

USE THIS AS A CONVERSATION STARTER

These questions are not a psychometric instrument. Ask reviewers to describe observable issues and alternative readings rather than rating the author as a person.

14 / QUALITY ASSURANCE

PUBLISH THE RECEIPTS WITH THE ART.

Before going live, do the quiet verification work that protects the loud creative work.

☐**SOURCE CHECK**

Every factual claim has a relevant, traceable primary or authoritative source.

☐**SCOPE CHECK**

No abstract or headline quietly claims more than the cited work supports.

☐**LINK CHECK**

URLs and DOI links actually resolve; explain paywalls when material.

☐**STATUS CHECK**

Interpretation, speculation and invented demonstrations are labeled.

☐**ACCESS CHECK**

Keyboard operation, visible focus, no-motion alternative and text equivalents work.

☐**MOBILE CHECK**

Reference labels are not clipped, hidden or pushed below inaccessible overlays.

☐**PRINT CHECK**

The PDF remains readable in black and white and works away from the website.

☐**LICENSE CHECK**

Credit your own work accurately; exclude borrowed content unless rights are clear.

Suggested evidence trail: ACRL [1] for information literacy; McGrew et al. [2] for a research example in evaluating online sources; Crossref [3] for DOI display; W3C [4] for interface accessibility.

15 / LIMITATIONS

THE AESTHETIC IS NOT A METHOD.

Good graphic direction can create curiosity. It does not create missing evidence.

NO CLAIMED EXPERIMENTAL VALIDATION

The Neon Footnote interaction, colour scheme and worksheets are original editorial teaching devices. This guide does not report an experiment testing their effect on learning, trust, belief change or retention.

NO MAGIC AUTHORITY

Peer review, DOI registration, institutional position and publication quality are useful clues in context, not guarantees of truth. Even properly sourced claims can be incomplete or mistaken. Seek sources that can potentially falsify the preferred story.

RESPECT PEOPLE, NOT JUST REFERENCES

Do not weaponise citation aesthetics to insinuate wrongdoing by named individuals or their families. Avoid attaching identifiable people to invented allegations, selectively clipped material or misleading headlines.

CORRECTIONS ARE PART OF THE WORK

Keep a date and version where relevant. If a factual statement changes, explain what changed and why. Allow critical readers to follow the path from your claim to the source.

THE LINE TO KEEP

Style is an invitation. Evidence is a responsibility. Meaning is a conversation. None of these needs to erase the others.

16 / BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE ACTUAL REFERENCES.

These sources ground particular statements in the guide. They should not be read as endorsing the Neon Footnote project or its original pedagogy.

[1] ACRL – Association of College & Research Libraries

Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. ACRL / American Library Association.

<https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

[2] McGrew, S., Breakstone, J., Ortega, T., Smith, M., & Wineburg, S. (2018)

Can Students Evaluate Online Sources? Learning From Assessments of Civic Online Reasoning. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 46(2), 165–193.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2017.1416320>

[3] Crossref

Crossref Display Guidelines (March 2017; page updated with accessibility notice, 2022).

<https://www.crossref.org/display-guidelines>

[4] W3C Web Accessibility Initiative

What's New in WCAG 2.2. Guidance on keyboard focus and related criteria.

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/new-in-22/>

REFERENCING PRACTICE

Always inspect a source before reusing it. A bare link, like a fashionable badge, is not a substitute for accurately representing what the source says.

17 / BACK COVER

THE ART CAN BE FREE. THE SOURCE STAYS.

A production note from the Sahilverse: intellectual honesty and playful experimentation are compatible.

THIS PUBLICATION

Original editorial concepts, copy, layouts, diagrams, teaching examples and worksheets by Sahil Tayal, created for Neon Footnote (2026). The fictional Midnight Poster case is explicitly an invented teaching example.

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FIND THE OTHER WORLDS

Visit <https://sahiltayal.com> for the canonical Sahilverse entry and pathways to related writing, research, culture and interactive worlds. The project-specific website is <https://neonfootnote.sahilwho.online/>.

CORRESPONDENCE

Write to sahil@sahiltayal.com with the subject “Neon Footnote — Field Notes”. Corrections, thoughtful disagreement and source leads are welcome.

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