The Voice of Authority

“I’m not a doctor, but I play one on TV.” Is this an authority speaking?

In an appeal to authority, something is claimed to be true based on the expertise of an authority rather than objective facts. When analyzing appeals, make sure that the person really is an expert in the field, there is sufficient agreement to make it a fact and the presenter of the information is not biased.

Keith Curry Lance, director of library research at Colorado State Library and the University of Denver, made the following comments in a report sanctioned by the ProQuest Company: “Scientific research of the learning process, including recent brain research, validates that the most effective and long-term learning occurs when students are given opportunities to solve problems that are relevant to their world and have an opportunity to express their reasoned opinions and conclusions after in-depth study (Source: www.proquestk12.com/lsm/pqelib/pdfs/SBReLibTeacherTraining.pdf). Student curiosity and the innate desire for self-expression provide powerful motivation for learning. Research activities that integrate critical thinking and original thought are the essential skills that students will need to succeed in school, college and in careers in the Information Age.”

Is the source objective?

1. Is the source presenting straight facts?

2. Are the facts being filtered through another author’s analysis?

3. If so, is that author objective?

4. Are the source’s conclusions in line with those of most other experts in the field?

5. Have we verified those conclusions by assessing the facts ourselves?