



Evaluating Information Sources

It is important to evaluate the information you find. Not all sources are written or reviewed by experts.

This is especially true with Internet sites, where anyone can publish information without quality review. Consider the following when evaluating information:

Accuracy

HOW was the resource written?

- As a report, factually?
- As an opinion or column, with a point of view?
- As propaganda, highly biased? Balanced perspective?
- Are sources cited? Is information verifiable?

Audience

WHY was the information published?

- To inform? Will the content support an informational paper?
- To explain? Will the content support an informational or position paper?
- To persuade? Will the content support a position paper? Compare & contrast an issue?
- To sell? Will the content support a position paper?

WHERE is the source found?

- Recognized publication? Is the information from a respected or known publisher?
- Respected organization? Is the information neutral, offering different points of view or suggest certain biases that you need to consider?

Authority

WHO is responsible for the information in the source?

- Who is the author? What is the reputation of author/organization? Is it written by an expert? (For Web sites, domain names ending with .edu or .gov are considered better research-oriented sites than .com or .org domains.)
- Affiliation? Is it published to represent a certain viewpoint?
- Organization? Does it indicate or result in a specific bias?
- Any reviews written or awards received of author's works?

Currency

WHEN was the source published?

- Is it up-to-date enough for your needs? How current should the information be?
- Does the source provide enough historical information for the time period?
- When was the item last revised? (For Web sites, are there lots of "dead links"?)

Scope

WHAT is the subject of the source?

- Does it relate to your topic?
- Does the preface or introduction state a purpose and address your issues?
- Does the table of contents or index indicate sufficient topic coverage?
- Is there sufficient breadth and depth of coverage on your topic?

Evaluating Information Sources—Part 2: On Accuracy and Validity

Evaluation should always be a key step throughout your research.

**Whatever you read, watch, or listen to,
keep in mind the following six guiding principles:**

1. **Always think actively and critically as you read**
Does the argument you are reading make sense?
2. **No one is perfect**
Everyone makes mistakes, even those whose research is accepted and published.

Again, does the argument make sense? Does the data presented support the argument?
3. **"Unbiased information" is an oxymoron**
Everyone has an opinion or an agenda. - What is the writer's motivation? - What is the writer's intent? How is the writer presenting the information? - How subjective is the presentation?
4. **Never assume**
Make sure the opinion you read is backed by facts. Then double-check them!
5. **Appearances can be deceiving**
What has been presented? What has not been presented?
Make sure that ALL the pertinent facts are presented in an argument, not just one side.
Good research involves no cherry-picking.
6. **A house stands or falls on its foundation**
Look at the sources cited by the writer. Are they reliable, reputable, objective sources?
- If the writer is addressing a current issue or using data to support a position, is the information coming from current sources? - Is there a pattern or particular viewpoint associated with the sources?