

Evaluating Resources

Evaluation is about assessing or judging whether or not you trust a resource. This assessment relies on you looking carefully at some parts of the resource itself and also looking outside the resource for additional information. There are 5 important criteria to look into. **Don't just passively consider the questions about each criteria, make judgments about whether you trust an author or publisher, or if you think the sources are reliable.**

Currency

- When was the material published? (NOTE: copyright date is not the same as publication date)
- Is the information accurate for when it was written?
- Does your research demand current information or is older information useful?
- How often is research updated in this discipline?
- Is this resource updated frequently?

Author

- Consult the author's website/Wikipedia/Sourcewatch to help answer the following questions:
 - Does the author have authority on the topic?
 - Has the author written any other works?
 - What are the author's credentials?
 - Does the author have a graduate degree in the area she or he is writing about?
 - Do they teach at a college or university?
 - Are they a professional researcher at a university, government agency or private company?
 - Do you see a bias or particular point of view in this author's affiliations?
 - Are they a member of a "think tank"- i.e. the Kato Institute or the Brookings Institute?
 - Are they a "talking head" – i.e. someone who is a media personality?
 - Are they associated with an activist organization that is concerned about the issues that the author is writing about?

Publisher/Publication

- What, if anything, do you already know about the publisher?
- Consult the publisher's website/Wikipedia/Sourcewatch to help answer the following questions:
 - Do they have a reputation for publishing quality information?
 - Does the publisher have a clearly articulated editorial policy?
 - Is the publisher a university press, a large commercial publisher, a small publisher, or an alternative press publisher?
 - If it's a scholarly journal, do you see a mission statement for original scholarship or research? Do you see a peer review policy and editorial board full of experts in the field?

Point of View

- Is the information scholarly, popular, governmental, activist or from a private business? What influence does this have on how you use the information?
- What is the purpose of the source? How will it impact your research? Is the purpose to inform, entertain, teach, or to influence?
- Is the author giving a factual report, presenting a well-researched scholarly opinion, or relaying a personal opinion?
- Who is the intended audience--general public or other academics and researchers?
- Does the author offer several points of view?
- Can you identify objective writing (both sides of the argument) or a subjective bias (expressing one's own point of view)?
- Is the writing style of the author clear and understandable? Does the author legitimately need to use complex language because of the subject matter, or is complex technical language used to possibly confuse the reader?

Sources

- Can you determine where the author gathered the information? (hint: in addition to citations, bibliographies, works cited pages and footnotes, look for in-text references to outside sources)
- Is the material from original research including case studies, experiments and observations? Are helpful charts, graphs, or pictures provided? What do these graphics represent?
- Is the material from journalistic investigation including interviews, government reports, think tank reports or eyewitness accounts?