



Evaluation of Information Sources

Use the following criteria to determine the quality and usefulness of the information you have found, whether the material is from books, articles, or the World Wide Web:

- 1. Author: *Is the author knowledgeable about the topic?***
 - A. Individual author: What is his or her educational background and current affiliation?
 - B. Group author: Is the group associated with a reputable organization or institution?

- 2. Content: *Is the content reliable and complete?***
 - A. What is the **scope**, theme, or purpose of the source? Read the preface, table of contents, index of a book. Read the introduction or abstract and look over the references of a periodical article.
 - B. Is the content **accurate**? Facts can be verified by looking in other sources.
 - C. What is the **point of view**? Is there evidence of bias? Is the information presented in an objective and impartial style, or are there emotion-arousing words and illustrations designed to sway readers?
 - D. Is there evidence of valid, extensive **research**? Are there footnotes and a bibliography?

- 3. Date of publication: *Is the publication date appropriate for your topic?***
 - A. Historical topics – the publication date may not be relevant.
 - B. Current topics – recently published material is most accurate.
 - C. Web sites – look at date of last revision; is the site revised regularly?

- 4. Source of material, type of material: *Is the information from scholarly or popular sources?***
 - A. Books – Look at the publisher (university presses publish scholarly material).
 - B. Articles – Is the periodical a scholarly or popular source (see “Scholarly vs. Popular Periodicals: How to Tell the Difference”).
 - C. Electronic source – Articles and books accessed through databases provided by an academic library are reliable sources. Information found on the Internet must be evaluated more carefully.

5. **Web sites:** *Material found in libraries has been selected by librarians and scholars and has passed an evaluation process. Students must be more careful with information found on the World Wide Web. In general, use the criteria described above: Author, Content, Date, Source.*
- A. **Author:** What are the credentials of the author(s)? Look for “About us” or “Contact us” on the homepage.
 - B. **Content:** Use the criteria listed in item 2 on this handout. Look for the scope, signs of bias, evidence of research.
 - C. **Date:** When was the material published? How often is the page revised or updated?
 - D. **Source:** Look at the domain. Government and education sites are the most appropriate sources for college papers.
 - .gov -- a government site
 - .edu -- an educational organization (K-12, college)
 - .org -- a private organization
 - .com -- a private company
 - .net -- a network
 - E. **Page ownership:** Look for the “home” or first page of the web site. If there is no link to “home” truncate the URL (delete sections at the right end) section by section to try to get to a first page.
 - F. **Purpose:** Is the web site trying to provide information, to entertain, or to sell something?
 - F. **Users:** Who uses the page? Who links to it? To find out, use the search engine *Google*. Type: *link:name of web site*
 - G. **Recognition:** Does the page have any awards?

