

Critical Evaluation of Information Resources

There are many types of resources that you may encounter when conducting research: books, articles, Web sites, etc. How do you assess the usefulness of resources for your own research needs?

See also:

- [Critical Evaluation of Web Resources](#)

1. Is the Resource Suitable for My Research?

- Does it provide a basic overview of my topic? Does it place my topic within the context of a larger subject area?
- Does it cover a time period that I am interested in?
- Is the article too basic or elementary for my needs? Is it too specialized or technical for my needs? Who is this resource geared towards?
- When was this resource published? Do I need the most current information or analysis on this topic, or is older information appropriate for my needs?

2. Is the Information Authoritative?

- Who wrote and/or published this resource? What credentials qualify him to write on this topic? What else has he written?
- Do I require scholarly information, or is more popular material also appropriate?

	Scholarly	Popular
Purpose/Content	Disseminate new research and theory. Extensive detail of theory, methods and research tools.	Inform and entertain the public. News, opinion pieces, general interest stories.
Audience	Academics, postsecondary students. Assumes subject expertise.	General public. Subject expertise not generally expected.
Authors	Scholars (PhDs, faculty, curators, etc.).	Reporters, journalists.
Accountability	Peer-reviewed.	Editor, fact checkers, journalistic ethics.
Appearance	Plain, articles with abstracts & bibliographies, only graphics necessary to elucidate a point, little advertising.	Eye-catching, many pictures, often substantial advertising.
Publisher	Scholarly society, university, or specialist commercial firm.	Commercial.
Access	University libraries. Generally indexed in index specific to its field (e.g., Philosophers Index).	Newsstands, individual subscribers, public libraries. Reputable publications indexed by general purpose indexes (e.g., Expanded Academic)

3. Documentation

- What sources does the author cite to back up her points? Is a bibliography included with the

information?

- If the information relies heavily on statistics, where did those statistics come from? Were they gathered in a methodologically appropriate manner? Were they pulled from another reputable source (e.g., Statistics Canada)?

4. Objectivity

- Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda? Is the author trying to advance a particular position? Is there a clearly supported argument or is the argument inflammatory and unsupported? Is the publication or organization providing the information known for having a particular philosophical or political position?

5. Primary vs. Secondary Sources

Primary

Original Research.

A journal article that presents new findings and new theories.

A newspaper account written by a journalist who was present at the event he or she is describing.

Dissertations.

Secondary

Evaluation or overview of previously presented material.

A scientific review article.

An encyclopedia entry.

A textbook.

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