



Evaluating Information Resources: Criteria to Consider

Knowing how to find information in Milner Library and on the Internet is an important ability. *Evaluating the information that you find for accuracy and usefulness is the next step.* The criteria below should assist you in determining the quality of the information that you have found and whether you should use the information or continue your search.

Coverage – In order to determine the value of the information, you will need to understand the information. Think about:

- What conclusions are presented? What premises/claims are presented?
- Does the evidence support the premises/claims and conclusions?
- Is the information that is provided complete?
- How does this resource compare to other resources on the same topic?
- Are facts and claims documented through foot/endnotes, bibliography or other references?
- Are there factual or typographical errors, or inexplicable omissions, in the information?
- Are there any biases in the information?
- How current is the information?

Author/Creator – The person who created the information is considered important in determining the credibility of the information. Think about:

- Who created the information? Is there contact information available?
- What is the reputation of the creator? Is the creator a reputable and reliable scholar or writer? Is the creator an expert on the topic? Are qualifications clearly stated?
- Is organizational affiliation or contact information given?

Audience/Purpose – The audience can give you insight into the purpose that the author has for the information. Think about:

- For whom was the information created, based on content, tone and style?
- Does the audience have a bias or point-of-view that might effect the information?
- What is the purpose of the resource, i.e. to inform, convince, sell, entertain, etc.?
- What does it contribute to the literature in the field?

Relevancy – Finally, and most importantly, consider whether the information that you have found is relevant to *your* research. High quality, scholarly information will not meet your information needs if it is off-topic. On the other hand, even obviously biased information may be relevant to a particular research project.

How to Tell the Difference Between Scholarly Work and Propaganda

Indicators of Scholarship	Indicators of Propaganda
Describes limits of research or data.	Excessive claims of certainty, i.e. one "right" way of thinking.
Presents accurate description of alternate viewpoints.	Relies on personal attacks and ridicule.
Encourages debate, discussion, and criticism.	Emotional appeals. Use of inflammatory language.
Settles disputes by use of generally accepted criteria for evaluating data.	Suppresses contradictory views.
Looks for counter-examples.	Appeals to popular prejudices.
Updates information.	Devalues critical appraisal.
Admits own ignorance.	Transforms words and statistics to suit purpose.
Relies on critical thinking skills	Presents information and views out of context.

Sources

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