

EVALUATING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Once you have located a particular source of information consider the following key questions:

1. Does the information meet the requirements of the task? E.g.:

- » Does the task require you to use particular types of information sources? (for example, peer-reviewed articles or primary sources).
- » Does the task specify a particular timeframe? (for example, a current analysis, historical perspective, or sources published in the last five years).
- » What is the scope or the task? (for example, broad coverage of the general literature, information on a specialised topic, or a discussion of alternative viewpoints).

For more information on evaluating sources see:
<http://libguides.library.cqu.edu.au/evaluating-resources>

2. Is the source of the information of suitable quality and reliability?

Not all of the information you find will be suitable for use in your assignments. Using the following criteria can help you decide whether the information is appropriate for your task:

- » Currency: is the source up to date?
- » Reliability: how is the information and data validated?
- » Coverage: how broad is the scope?
- » Accuracy: is the information based on facts or personal opinion, and are any supporting references provided?
- » Authority: is the author an expert or specialist, with academic qualifications and recognition in the discipline?
- » Purpose: why was the information produced and who is the intended audience?

Find information about the credibility of the author by checking biography details on the book's jacket, or within the book itself, or by using a search engine such as:
<http://www.google.com.au/>

3. Other questions to consider:

- » Is the author of the publication an expert in the field?
- » What work or educational experience does the author have?
- » With which institution, organisation or company is the author affiliated?
- » Has the author written other publications? (check the library databases and Google Scholar)
- » Is the publisher well known?
- » Does the publisher stand to benefit directly from the research or argument presented in the book or journal?
- » Is the article peer-reviewed and published in a refereed journal (if important to your task)?
- » What sources did the author use? Check reference lists in journal papers.
- » Does the article address a topic from a certain time-frame and/or geographic area?

EVALUATING WEBSITES

Find information about a publisher by searching for the publisher's website using a search engine, and then looking for links that say About Us or something similar, for example, Cengage Learning, at:
<http://www.cengage.com.au/>

For further guidance when evaluating websites, see:
<http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html>

Watch a tutorial on evaluating websites at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_qR5pnXBE

Many websites are not subjected to the same evaluative and quality control processes used with traditional information sources such as books and journals. Information on web pages is also not stable, since it can be altered at any time.

Questions to ask include:

- » What type of domain is in the website URL? For example *.edu* is an educational domain, whereas *.com* is commercial.
- » Is it a personal website, or that of an organisation?
- » Who published the website, and when was it last updated? You can Google the organisation, or author, to find out more.
- » Are the author's credentials and contact details listed on the website? Look for details at the top and/or bottom of the webpage to find out.
- » What audience is the website aimed at? For example, Wikipedia is aimed at the general public and is generally not regarded as a scholarly source.

