

Evaluating Information Sources



When researching for your essay or assignment, it is important to ask questions about the type of information you are using. Remember to use information to back up your argument or opinion regarding the subject.

Relevance

Does the source have appropriate information you require? Is the information too general or too specific? Is it opinion or fact? Is it an academic/scholarly piece? Is the information supported or verified by other information sources?

Authority

Is the information from a reliable source e.g. a recognised professional body or organisation? Does the author have appropriate qualifications, background or knowledge of the subject? Is there an obvious bias promoted by the author or publisher? Has the information been peer reviewed? Is the information supported by appropriate references?

Language

How is it written? Is the language used too technical or too basic? Is it easily understood? Is the style of writing clear? Is the text easy to read?

Audience

Who is it written for? Do you need to have some knowledge of the subject already? What is the level it is aimed at – general public, young children, tertiary students, professionals?

Currency

Is the information current for the topic/subject? Up-to-date? Too old? Or do you need historical material? Do you need to compare information over a time period? When was it published?

Appropriateness

Check your topic/subject? What are your specific needs? Does the information meet some or all of the requirements? What is missing? Do you need statistics, graphics and/or a range? What format is needed - DVD, poster, articles, books or web?

Evaluating internet information

Some further points to consider:

- ◇ Anyone can place information on the web.
- ◇ It is not always obvious who placed the information on the web site.
- ◇ Information on the web can be exceptionally up-to-date but just as easily out-dated and incorrect.
- ◇ There are very few or no quality controls on the content of web pages. There is a lot of advertising on the web. Think about the intention of the author. Is it to inform, sell products or educate?