Evaluating Information Resources

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Objective

- This session will enable the library user to critically analyze information resources and incorporate the selected information into his/her knowledge base and value system.

Evaluation Criteria

- In academic research and in everyday life, you cannot always trust what you read. Information (both in print and online) can be misleading.

- The ability to evaluate information according to authority, accuracy, currency, and purpose or objective helps you to understand the content and select sources that are appropriate for your assignments.

There are five criteria to be aware of whenever you evaluate your information sources.

- Accuracy

- Authority

- Objectivity

- Currency

- Coverage

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Accuracy

- Information is accurate if it is free from mistakes or errors. Some indicators of probable accuracy are agreement with other sources focused on the same subject, inclusion of citations or references to the sources used to create the information, and reviewed by other subject matter experts.

- If you're not already an expert on a particular topic, it can be difficult to determine whether or not the information in a book or article, or on a web page, is accurate.

Ask yourself

- Is the information in the article cited? An article with references or citations is far more likely to be accurate because the information can be verified by going to the original sources.

- Are the sources fro factual information given so they can be verified?

- Do you see any blatant errors?

- If statistics are given, do the authors say where the statistics come from?

- Are there typographical errors? Spelling or grammar errors? If so, you'll want to be very careful about using that article as a resource. Bad or non-existent editing usually means that the information in the article hasn't been closely reviewed.

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Authority

- Authority refers to possession of knowledge or experience in a specific field that qualifies a person to present information or opinion considered expert and reliable.

- If a applicant isn't held personally accountable for the ads he or she runs, they're more likely to make wild and irresponsible claims.

  Is it clear who the author or publisher is?

- Is there information about the author's qualifications?

- Once we know who's responsible for an information source, we can ask: are they an authority on the topic?

- **Ask yourself:**

- What are the author or organization's credentials?

- Are any credentials even given?

- Is the author qualified to write this document?

- Is the book, article, website, etc. written in their area of expertise?

- Is the author affiliated with an educational institution?

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Objectivity

- Information that is accurate may be misleading if its author presents partial information related to topic, opinions disguised as facts or information gleaned from a flawed research study. Objective information sources enable you to formulate your own conclusions about research topics and meet your professor's assignment requirements. A work whose author strives to inform, rather than persuade, makes clear distinctions between fact and opinion, presents multiple perspectives, and is not paid by a commercial organization. These are more likely to be objective.

- Objectivity involves about bias. What are the biases of the authors or the organization behind the information? Bias isn't necessarily bad. Just because an author or organization has a particular point of view doesn't mean that their information is inaccurate or lacks authority.

- In order to write a well-rounded paper, you'll likely want to collect information from the other side of the issue as well. When all your information comes from just one side of a debate, your paper will lack balance and perspective.

Ask yourself…

- Is the information factual, opinion, unbiased and in depth?

- Do you detect any kind of spin?

- Is the information well-researched? Is there a   bibliography or citations or references at the end?

- Is the author objective and un-biased? Bias   isn't always bad, but you'll always want to be aware of what the author's bias is?

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Currency

- Information is current if it is accurate at the present time as opposed to some earlier time. The ability to analyze information according to this criterion is important for assignment or topic questions that require current information.

- Some research projects require very up-to-date information in order to be accurate. For some projects older resources might be fine. For many, though, currency is a major issue.

Ask yourself:

- Is the site up to date and current?

- Is there a copyright date?

- When was it last revised?

- When was the book, article, or website published or produced?

- You'll often find a website's publication information at the bottom of the page.

- If you're using a website, when was it last updated? How many dead links are on the site? This is important to check, because many websites have been created and abandoned in the last 15 years.

- Is the information outdated? (It may have been current at one time, but is it still?) For some subjects, like history, this may be less important. For others, like technology, currency is critical

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Coverage

- Coverage looks at how well a subject is covered. Is the article in depth or just a surface review? Both can be useful in different settings, so it is important to determine which you require for your assignment.

- Earlier when we talked about objectivity, we also talked about bias. While bias isn't inherently bad, you don't want your total pool of resources to reflect the same bias. Otherwise you're only getting part of the picture. In part, this is what "***coverage***" asks: what part of the picture are you getting with your information resource? Think about the scope of the book, article, or website you want to use.

- Does the resource add new information or does it simply compile information easily found elsewhere?

- Does it extensively or minimally cover the topic? Is the information well-organized?

- Does it provide an in-depth review of the topic or is it a superficial overview with broad, general statements?

- Are the main points clearly presented?

- Is the target audience identified and appropriate for your needs?

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Thank you

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