J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

Your first stop for information and research needs!

Evaluating Information Sources

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In this Information Age, we are inundated daily with information both on the Web and in print. With a barrage of information growing daily, it is often difficult to recognize the reliability, relevancy and value of a particular resource, especially when trying to find material for a research assignment or paper.

While books and periodical articles found on the library shelves and in the library databases are reviewed by publishers and subject experts before publication, many web pages found through search engines like Google or Yahoo are not checked for accuracy or credibility. This lack of quality control allows ANYONE to publish their opinions and ideas on the Internet, including many people who may not be experts on the topics they write about.

In light of these facts, it is vital to evaluate resources you find both on the Web and in print. To help you in this evaluation process, use the checklist below which provides questions to ask when trying to identify resources to use for a research assignment or paper.

Evaluation Criteria Checklist

What?	What does the work cover? Is it relevant to my topic? Does the work provide general or comprehensive information? What type of audience was the work written for? If there is an issue, are both sides presented?	Read the summary if available. Review the full text. Check for a thesis statement and conclusion.
When?	When was the work written? Is it clear when the work was published or when the site was last updated? Is the information up to date enough for the topic chosen or do you need historical information?	Check for a publication date. Currency is important in fields such as medicine, science and technology. In other fields such as history and literature, older materials may be just as valuable as newer ones.
Who?	Who is the author or sponsoring organization? What makes the author an expert in the field written about? What credentials does the author have? Is there any contact information for the author?	Google the author's name and see if you can retrieve some background information or credentials on the author.
Why?	Why was the work written? Is its purpose to educate, entertain, inform, persuade, sell something, etc.? Does the site contain advertising? Is the information biased or does it push a specific perspective?	Check to see if the author is affiliated with any organizations. Check for ads on the site. Read the fine print.
How?	Is the site easy to navigate? Are there obvious signs of typos or errors? Does the author provide references so you can verify factual information?	Check for navigation menus. Check to see if the links work. Check for references.