

Activity: Assessing Currency

Currency is an important value in disciplines where information is always changing, such as science, technology, and medicine. In this activity, you will review the meaning of currency and explore how it affects your selection of sources on a topic of your choice.

Directions: Explain what currency means, and list at least two ways to tell how current a source is. Then, perform a search for a topic of your choice. Analyze two of the sources from your search to determine how current they are, and discuss how their currency affects their usefulness for academic research.

Your response should include:

- An explanation of the meaning of currency
- A list of at least two ways to determine the currency of a source
- A brief explanation of your search topic
- A brief evaluation of two sources related to your search topic and their currency

Sample response

Currency means how up-to-date a source is. There are several ways to assess this.

- How recently was the source updated?
- What about the sources cited—are they recent?
- Is newer information available, or has information on the topic changed recently?
- How important is currency for this topic?

I chose the search topic of infant mortality in the United States. Currency was very important in my search on this topic. The statistics on infant mortality in the United States are collected every year, but it often takes another couple of years before analysis of those statistics is published. In my initial search, I found a fairly recent article from 2009 (MacDorman MF, Mathews TJ. The challenge of infant mortality: have we reached a plateau? Public Health Rep. 2009 Sep-Oct;124(5):670-81.) This article analyzed the most recent data available and concluded that although infant mortality had declined during the 20th century, the rate had stayed almost the same in the first part of the 21st century. This seemed like a good place to start, but I wondered whether a more current source was available.

On further searching, I found that the same authors had published a more recent article on the same topic 2013 (MacDorman MF, Hoyert DL, Mathews TJ. Recent declines in

infant mortality in the United States, 2005–2011. NCHS data brief, no 120. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2013). This article analyzed five additional years of data and reaches the opposite conclusion of the previous study: the authors conclude that the infant mortality rate is declining significantly.

In this case, it was very important to check and see whether newer information was available. The newer information contradicted the first source I found, so finding the most current source was essential for this topic.