Evaluating Resources

In this module you will learn the criteria necessary to evaluate information resources effectively.

The amount of information resources available can be overwhelming.

Reviewing information sources based on the criteria of:

1. Authority
2. Timeliness or Currency of the information
3. Bias
4. Accuracy and Credibility

will help you identify the best resources for your paper or project.
1. **AUTHORITY**

Who is the author? What are his or her qualifications to write about the subject at hand?

In the case of traditionally published sources like books of journal articles, the issue of authority is relatively easy to deal with because the vetting process that happens during publishing. Authorship is often stated along with qualifications and affiliations.
Determining authority on a website can be more challenging.

When using web resources, if the site is an educational or government site, such as the Center for Disease Control, you may not find a personal name listed and will need to evaluate the organization as a whole for authority.

Web sites ending in .gov or .edu are generally more authoritative than those ending in .com or .org, but not always.
2. **TIMELINESS or CURRENCY OF INFORMATION**

When you're writing on a current topic, you’ll want the latest information and statistics. For other topics, historical information may be more appropriate.

For an SWOT analysis of the banking industry, you would need recent information.

If you were writing about the abolitionist movement, historical sources would be appropriate.
Currency in printed works is relatively easy to check by looking at the copyright or publication dates. This is a screenshot from the library catalog, and publication dates are easy to see. *(see dates circled in red below)*
3. **BIAS or POINT OF VIEW**

Whether you are looking at traditionally published information sources or web sources, it is difficult to find a totally unbiased source.

Some types of bias to watch out for in both print sources and web resources are marketing and advocacy. It helps to think about the purpose of the publication. Is it to persuade, or to sell?
When approaching a current issue or controversial topic, a good place to start your research is a library database like ‘CQ Researcher’ or ‘Points of View,’ as these databases present both sides of major issues and have been vetted.
4. ACCURACY AND CREDIBILITY

The site below is about a supplement. Lower on the page it says “studies have found” but there is no citation or link to these studies. Also, there is advertising on the page, so if there was a link to a study, one would wonder who funded it. Funding can create credibility issues if there is a conflict of interest.

Does the author provide citations to support arguments?

Advertising?

Who paid for these studies?
The article below from the library database ‘Academic Search Complete’ provides an international review of a number of studies on childhood obesity. It clearly describes the methodology of how the studies were selected, and at the end, it provides citations to each of the studies, in the event the reader wants to examine the primary data.
SUMMARY

You now have criteria to base your evaluation of an informational resource.

1. **Authority** - is it clear who is responsible for the information?
2. **Currency** - if it is a time-sensitive issue, are the resources recent?
3. **Bias** - ask yourself “what is the purpose of the source of information.” Is it to sell, to advocate for a cause, or to present information with as little bias as possible and air differing legitimate points of view?
4. **Accuracy & Credibility** - are the claims in the source accurate? If there is a study or statistics mentioned, are they cited to a reputable source?

Using these criteria will help you identify the best resources for your paper or project.