How to Evaluate Books, Journals and Websites

Evaluating Web Pages

Accuracy of Web documents
- Who wrote the page and can you contact him or her?
- What is the purpose of the document and why was it produced?
- Is this person qualified to write this document?
- Does the author provide email or a contact address/phone number?
- Can you distinguish between the author and Webmaster?

Authority of Web Documents
- Who published the document and is it separate from the webmaster?
- Check the domain of the document, what institution publishes this document?
- Does the publisher list his or her qualifications?
- What credentials are listed for the authors?
- Where is the document published?

Objectivity of Web Documents
- What goals/objectives does this page meet?
- How detailed is the information?
- What opinions (if any) are expressed by the author?
- Is the webpage full of advertising?

Currency of Web Documents
- When was it produced?
- When was it updated?
- Are there many dead links on the page?
- Are the links current and updated?
- Is the information on the webpage outdated?

Coverage of the Web Documents
• Are the links (if any) evaluated and do they support the documents theme?
• Is the webpage all images or a balance of text and images?
• Is the information cited correctly?
• Does the page require special software to view the information, how much are you missing if you don’t have the software?
• Is there option for text only, or frames, or suggested browser for better viewing?

Evaluating Journal Articles

Purpose of Article: Why was the article written? Was it to:

• Inform about an event, the results of an experiment or research study?
• Persuade the reader to change an opinion or belief? To prove or disprove something?
• Provide an overview of a topic or a comprehensive study, such as a literature review?

Author: Can you find out more about the author? What is his/her background? Is the author considered an expert in this field? What other works has he/she written? Has he/she won awards or honors?

Type of Journal: What kind of journal or magazine is it? Is it

• Scholarly? Scholarly journals publish articles which have first been reviewed by experts in the field. Check to see if there is an editorial board listed and who is on it. See if there is an editorial policy. What are the criteria for getting published by this journal or magazine?
• Trade magazines, published by an association or professional organization, are written for members of the profession or field. Check for editorial policies and publishing criteria.
• Popular magazines, such as Time and Newsweek, are not usually considered scholarly. Again, check for editorial policies and publishing criteria.

Bias (of the publisher): Some publications have an inherent bias that will impact articles printed in them. Is the journal:

• Left/liberal?
• Right/conservative?
• An alternative press?
• Published by an organization with a political agenda?
**Date of Article:** When was the article published? Was the article published a short or long time after the event or the research took place? Can you tell?

**Bibliography:** Scholarly articles should always contain a bibliography.

- Look at the length of the bibliography. Did the author only consult a few sources or does the bibliography appear to be a relatively comprehensive list?
- Look at the types of resources that are listed in the bibliography. Did the author consult primary sources, secondary resources or a combination of both?
- Look at the dates of the works listed in the bibliography. Did the author use the latest information available? Are the resources used much older than the book itself? Do the materials used represent a comprehensive overview of the published works?

**Illustrations:** Are there charts, graphs, maps, photographs, etc. used to illustrate concepts? Are the illustrations relevant to the text/topic? Remember that scholarly journal articles generally do not have many illustrations (depending on the topic).

**Audience:** Who is the intended audience of this journal? Is the level of the article appropriate for your needs? Is the article written for:

- General audience? Articles written for a general audience often use a simpler vocabulary and try to define or avoid subject specific terms or phrases.
- Members of the profession or experts in the field?
- Researchers or scholars? Often if an article is written for other professionals, the article will use terms and language special to the subject area.
Evaluating Books

Evaluating information is extremely important. Just because it is in print does not mean that it is reliable or true. Try using these criteria to help you learn to read books with a critical eye.

To evaluate a book look for:

**Purpose:** Why was this book written? Was it to:

- Inform the reader about an event, a person, and the results of an experiment or research study?
- Persuade the reader to change an opinion or belief? To prove something?
- Provide an overview of a topic or a comprehensive study?

Read carefully the introduction to the book. It will tell you a great deal about why the book was written, who wrote it, and even perhaps some of the inherent bias in the work.

**Author:** Find out something about the author. Is the author considered an expert in this field? What is his/her background? What other works has he/she written? Has he/she won awards or honors? Again, the introduction will often help you answer some of these questions.

**Publisher:** Check to see who published the book. You will find the publisher on the front or title page of the book.

- University Presses usually specialize in more academic or scholarly works. Check to see if there is an editorial board listed and who is on it.
- Commercial publishers, the majority of publishing houses, publish anything from scholarly works to works of fiction to children’s books.
- Professional or Trade Association, Institution, or Research Center’s often publish works by members of their association or research team.
- Government presses often publish useful information about their country but may also have a particular political agenda they want to achieve with a publication.
- Vanity press or self-published works means the author has paid to have the book published.

**Date of Publication:** Check the publication date of the book. What was the prevailing attitude towards the topic at the time the book was published? If it is a new edition of a work, is it the latest edition? Are there significant changes between editions?

**Bibliography:** A scholarly work will always contain a bibliography.
• Check the length of the bibliography. Did the author consult only a few sources or does it appear to be an extensive list?
• Check what types of sources are listed in the bibliography. Are the references listed mostly primary sources, secondary sources or a combination of both?
• Check the dates of the works in the bibliography. Did the author use the latest information available? Are the resources used much older than the book itself? Do the materials used represent a comprehensive overview of the published works?

**Audience:** Who is the intended audience of this book? Is the level of the book appropriate for your needs? Is the book written for: general readers, students (high school, college, graduate), specialists or professionals in the field, researchers or scholars?

**Illustrations:** Are there charts, graphs, maps, photographs, etc. used to illustrate concepts? Are the illustrations relevant to the text/topic?