



Guide to Evaluating Sources

Use this guide to help you to evaluate print or electronic research and information sources, a core information competency skill. For more assistance in the research process, please see a reference librarian. The following has been adapted, with permission, from: Cornell University Library. Critically Analyzing Information Sources. Available at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm>.

Authorship



- What are the author's credentials—educational background, past writings, or experience?
- Has your instructor mentioned this author?
- Is the author associated with a reputable institution or organization?
- Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies?
- Respected authors are cited frequently by other scholars. For this reason, always note those names that appear in many different sources

Date of Publication

- When was the source published? The date is often located on the back of the title page (if the source is a book)
- Is the source current or out-of date for your topic? Topic areas of continuing and rapid development, such as the sciences, demand more current information
- If you are looking at a web page, the date may have various meanings:
 - date information *first written*
 - date information *first placed on the web*
 - date information *last revised or modified*



Audience

- What type of audience is the author addressing?
- Is the publication aimed at a specialized or general audience? Is this source too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your needs?



Objectivity



- Is the information covered fact, opinion, propaganda?
- Facts* can usually be verified; *opinions*, though they may be based on factual information, evolve from the interpretation of facts
- It is not always easy to separate fact from opinion
- What opinions (if any) are expressed by the author?
- Is the material biased or unbalanced?

Coverage

- Does the work update other sources or add to what you already know about your subject?
- You should explore enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints. Try to include both current events sources (such as newspaper articles) and retrospective ones (scientific or scholarly analyses)