

Tips for Evaluating Information

Evaluating Information

It's important to evaluate any information you may use for your assignments, especially anything found on the internet. There are few, if any, quality controls on the internet, so be aware. Information can be inaccurate, totally unreliable, out of date, false, biased, here today and gone tomorrow. When you have found a resource do not take it at face value but try and check its authority – Evaluate! Below are some tips and ideas, for that evaluation process, of information found on the internet.

Authority - Who is writing the information?

It's important to know or at least try and find who is responsible for the information you are using, be it an individual or an organisation. If it is a person, what is her/his educational or occupational background? Is he/she an unknown individual or someone connected with a respected professional association, educational institution or commercial publisher? In other words, with what authority do they write? The web address can inform a lot of these questions. For Example:

Educational Institutions usually end **.ac.uk**

Government departments **.gov.uk**

The **.uk** part of the web address is also very significant, especially where you are looking at policy or legal issues Most of the time you will need to understand/present information from a UK perspective or maybe even a Scottish one.

Be aware that individuals often create their own home pages as a means of self-publishing. The information may be of great value but will not have been through the peer and editorial review or quality control intrinsic to scholarship so should be regarded as possibly suspect. Information in Wikipedia is usually a perfect example of self-publishing and information with little or no quality control.

Bias and Viewpoint

How objective is the information? Is it slanted in a particular direction? You should be aware of personal and political bias and the use of the internet for propaganda, campaign literature and activist publishing. It may be difficult to check this, but examine any statement of scope

or introductory explanation. Is the information promotional i.e. is it commercial advertising or trying to sell you something? Again, the web address gives a good indication of where information is coming from and your own background knowledge of a subject should help inform where the information is coming from and any bias it is likely to express. Eg. The views expressed by Friends of the Earth or the Green Party on the use of land may differ considerably from those expressed by BP or other commercially orientated organisations. Tip: To discover who owns a website, search for the website at <http://whois.net/>.

Is it up to date?

When was the information last updated? Look for a date at the bottom of the page. Are any links to other websites still working? Tip: If a webpage doesn't list its last modified date, you can check this using the Internet Archive. Although this won't give you an exact modified date, you can see the history of the webpage. Visit the Internet Archive and enter the link to the webpage you wish to check. Obviously, information currency is more relevant in some subjects than others, but is worthwhile being aware of when information was published and always checking it as part of your evaluation.

Detail and Level

How comprehensive is the information? What kind of audience is it aimed at? Does that level match your needs? Is it appropriate for your level of study and the detail needed for your assignment?

Ease of use and Accessibility

Is the site well-designed and easy to find your way around, or are there design features which get in the way? Are links to other pages obvious? Can you print easily from it?

Take a look at these sites and apply our evaluation criteria to them:

[ASH:](#) Action on Smoking and Health

[FOREST:](#) Voice and friend of the smoker

Tips for remembering how to Evaluate

Who?	Is the writer an authority on the topic? Do they represent the views of an organisation or coming from a commercial perspective? How do you know?
What?	Is the information relevant to your search and at the appropriate level for your studies? Is there a particular bias or viewpoint being presented?
Where?	Where is the information coming from? Have you double checked the details of the web address?
When?	Is the information current? How relevant is currency to what you are doing?
Why?	Why is the information being published and promoted? Is it a commercial site? Is it presenting a particular view/bias - who is the intended audience?

Further Information

Further information on evaluation can be found at the Open University:

[Advanced Evaluation](#)

There is also a useful fun video from Open University:

[Evaluating Information – Know what to trust](#)

The Scottish Government Library Services also produce some good guidance which can be downloaded from their webpages:

[Quick Guides- Evaluating Information and Fake News](#)

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