

EVALUATING INFORMATION SOURCES

Once you have searched the online catalog for books, periodical indexes/databases such as EBSCOhost for journal/magazine and newspaper articles, and the web for sites, the next step after retrieving your sources is to evaluate them for reliability and relevance to your research topic. *(For specifics on evaluating Web sources, please refer to the library handout "Criteria for Web Page Evaluation" available in print or online at: <http://www.library.dtcc.edu/wilmlib/Evalquest.html>.)* Here are some questions to consider when evaluating **all** information sources for: Accuracy, Authority, Coverage, Currency, Objectivity and Purpose.

ACCURACY

- Does the information presented contain documented facts or statistics referring to original sources of information? Are original sources cited?
- Are there grammatical, spelling or typographical errors? Such errors may lead to inaccuracies in information.
- Does the information seem accurate based on what you already know about the topic?

AUTHORITY

- **Author:** Is there a list of the author's credentials? Does he/she have expertise on the subject? What is his/her educational background? Where is the author employed? What else has he/she written? Note: Popular publications may not indicate an author or give his/her credentials, whereas scholarly sources usually do.
- **Publisher:** Is the publisher well known? For example: universities, other educational or research institutions are often publishers of books and articles by scholars and experts in their field. Commercial publishers, associations and government agencies also may publish reliable information.

COVERAGE

- Does the source cover the topic completely, partially, or is it just a general overview?
- Does the source refer to information you have found in other sources?
- Can you use the source to support/challenge a position you plan to use in your project?
- Is there a bibliography or works cited list that can lead you to other sources?

CURRENCY

- When was the source published? Notice if it is a reprint. Remember, the copyright date(s) will tell you when the information was first published.
- Is the source current for your particular topic? In fields such as nursing and technology, currency is important. In history and literature, older sources may be just as valuable.

(over please)

OBJECTIVITY

- Does the source present more than one viewpoint?
- Is there a minimum of bias?
- If there is bias, does the author acknowledge it?
- Is the source trying to sway an opinion, promote or sell something?

PURPOSE

- Is the author trying to inform, report research, give opinions, persuade, or sell?
- Who is the intended audience? Is the source scholarly or popular? (Please see the library handout on “scholarly vs. popular periodical articles” available in print or online at: <http://www.library.dtcc.edu/wilmlib/Periodicals.html>)

These books may help you evaluate information sources:

- Book Review Digest
- Encyclopedia of Associations
- Contemporary Authors
- Current Biography
- Literary Marketplace
- Who’s Who in America
- Writer’s Market

(Please ask your librarian if any or all of these books are available locally.)

An online periodical index/databases such as EBSCOhost can also be useful in looking up book reviews and biographical information. You can also check the Internet for information, just be sure it is reliable!