

## Evaluating Sources Check List:

Once you've located your resources in the online database and catalog, you should evaluate them to determine if the information presented is useful for your research. Consider the following criteria:

### Relevance

*Is the content of the item suitable for your research?*

In a journal article, usually the abstract or lead paragraph will give you enough information to determine if the item is relevant. Be sure to check the date of publication. Does it fit with your research needs?

**Circle your answer: Yes, No, Not Sure**

### Timeliness

*Is the information provided in the article or book up-to-date?*

Check the date of the publication. Are you looking for contemporary materials (sources which originated near or at the time of an event, idea, or phenomenon)? Are you looking for a current account of an historic event? The nature of your assignment will determine whether you need the most recent material available.

**Circle your answer: Yes, No, Not Sure**

### Reliability

*Is the information presented accurate and dependable?*

One way to help determine the reliability of a source is to compare the facts with other documents on the same topic to check supporting facts or data.

**Circle your answer: Yes, No, Not Sure**

### Validity

*From what sources were the facts gathered?*

Be sure that you know where the information presented in the source is coming from. Is the work based on personal opinion, original research, laboratory experiments, or other documentation? Is the periodical a scholarly journal or a popular source? A book based on opinion or research?

Look for bibliographies or original research as attachments or appendices. References often give you an opportunity to check item validity and are a possible avenue to additional resources.

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**Credibility**

*What are the author's credentials? Is the author an expert in the field?*

Biographical reference sources on your Library Guide or a Google search for the author can often give you this information.

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**Perspective**

*What is the author's point of view?*

Be watchful of author bias, especially when looking for objective accounts. Consider the author's cultural, political, social, and economic background.

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**Purpose**

*What is the purpose of the source? Why was this item written: to persuade; to reinforce; to preach to the choir; to provide an overview; to generate controversy and provoke?*

Ask these and similar questions about your source so that you can find out if it would be a good fit with your own research project. The purpose of a source can range from dissemination of information about an important study or research project, to the insight of a specific group of people, to propaganda. Also, you want to consider your own purpose in conducting your research: does it mesh with the purpose of your source?

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**Commercialism**

*Does the source contain advertisements or other forms of commercialism that may bias the information provided?*

Commercial intrusions into sources (particularly websites) can often make these sources difficult to use and unreliable. Your search for a source may be driven off course, for example, by websites directing you to their sponsors. Similarly, what information appears or does not appear in a source may be dictated by the commercial owners or pressures of a source. Be aware of this when you look for sources—particularly on the Internet.

**Circle your answer: Yes, No, Not Sure**

**Intended Audience**

*Who is the target audience (children, scholars, professionals, laypersons)? Is the source for scholarly use or popular reading?*

The intended audience is often reflected in the author’s style. Is the intended audience of the article appropriate to your research?

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**Sophistication**

*How well does the source present key information? Is it well written and organized, enabling you, the reader, to learn something from reading it?*

You should aim in your research to use sources two steps or so above your own current level of knowledge on the topic. Does your source fulfill this criterion, or is it obviously written 10 steps above or 10 steps below your current level of knowledge? If it is obviously not aimed for your general level of knowledge, discard it.

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**Type of Source**

(Look at last handout for details on types of sources)

**Circle your answer:    Popular, Trade, Scholarly**

**Will you use this source for your research paper? Why or why not?**

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