



Critical Evaluation in Research

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Critical Evaluation of a source is a crucial part of the research process. You may begin by examining the bibliographic citation. A bibliographic citation is a written description of a book, journal article, essay or other published material. Bibliographic citations have **three** main components: *author*, *title*, and *publication* information.

Author: What are the author's credentials in the field? Is the book/article in the author's area of expertise? Has your instructor mentioned this author in lectures? Is the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies? *Who's Who In America*, *Biography Index*, and the *Directory of American Scholars*, etc. are useful for determining the author's credentials.

Title: Is this a scholarly or a popular journal. Refer to the Wyllie Library Handout "Popular vs. Scholarly Information". You may also check the journal title in the latest edition of *Magazines for Libraries* (Z 6941 K2 1995 in the Reference Section) for a brief description. If the source is published by a university press, it is *likely* to be scholarly.

Publication Information: When was the source published? Is it current. Be aware that some fields, such as Information Systems, change more rapidly than other fields, such as the Humanities.

Is the source a first **edition** or not? Many editions indicate the source has been revised to reflect changes in the field. Many editions also indicate the work may have become a standard reference source in the field.

Content: Who is the author writing for. Is it for a specialized or a general audience? Does the information *suitably* answer your research needs?

Perspective: Is the source of information fact, opinion, or propaganda? Facts can usually be verified, while opinions are based on the interpretation of facts. Information should be well researched and supported by facts. Note the tone of the text. Propaganda in the source/text will often be characterized by emotion rousing words and bias. Be aware of how the content is being presented. Select the best resources for your research.

Coverage: How much of the source information is related to your topic? Is the source an update or does it add new information to the research topic? Examine enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints.

Primary vs. Secondary Sources: Primary sources are the building blocks of research. For example, if you were researching Lincoln's command of the Union Army during the Civil War, primary sources would consist of Lincoln's communications with Union generals on the battlefield. Other primary sources might include communications among Southern generals facing the Union Army, and contemporary newspaper accounts of battles. Historical interpretations of primary sources are considered secondary sources. Books and scholarly journal articles about Lincoln's command during the Civil War are all secondary sources.

Writing Style: Is the source organized logically? Are the author's main points presented in a clear fashion? Is the text easy to read, or does it seem choppy?

Evaluative reviews: Examine critical reviews of books in review indexes, such as *Book Review Index* and *Book review Digest*. Read the review carefully. Is the book considered a valuable contribution to the field? The review may mention other books that are a better choice. Do different reviewers agree on the value of the book or has it become controversial among critics?

On the back: HOW TO EVALUATE INTERNET RESOURCES

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF INTERNET RESOURCES

Some resources on the Internet have been evaluated (filtered) by reliable and qualified experts. However, much information found on the WWW has not been provided by sources that would qualify the information for acceptance as research material. How do you decide what resources you can use for research papers? Review the following and make an informed decision.

Author: Is the author identified? Is there a college/university/research institution identified as the author's affiliation? Are the author's credentials listed, such as degree(s), years of experience in the field, position, etc.?

WWW page location: Who supports this page, a university, a company, government, or organization? Is there quality control? Does the affiliation bias the information included on the page?

Date: Is there a date given for when the Web page/site was established? Has it been updated? Is it current?

Audience: Who was the information on the page designed for?

Purpose: Was the information designed to inform, explain or persuade?

Comparison: What other resources have you found on the Internet or in print format? Compare the information and decide what best and most reliably meets your research information needs.