

Evaluating Internet Research

Information exists as:

- ✓ Facts
- ✓ Opinions
- ✓ Stories
- ✓ Interpretations
- ✓ Statistics

Created for:

- ✓ To inform
- ✓ To persuade
- ✓ To sell
- ✓ To present a viewpoint
- ✓ To create or change an attitude or belief

Before going on Internet ask yourself:

- ✓ What are you looking for? (See list above)
- ✓ What do you want? (facts, opinions from qualified people or any Joe Schmoe, reasoned arguments, narratives, eyewitness reports, descriptions, etc.)
- ✓ What is the purpose of your search? (new ideas, facts/reasons to support your position, survey an opinion)
- ✓ What sources would be most credible for providing information in each case?

Source Selection List

Find sources that offer as much as the following:

Author's Name, Author's Title or Position, Author's Organizational Affiliation, Date of Page Creation, Author's Contact Information

Quality Sources Include:

Reliable information – Information serves as a basis for beliefs, decisions, choices, and understanding of the world.

There is no single perfect indicator of reliability, truthfulness, or value.

The CARS Checklist – (Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness, Support)

C.A.R.S.

CREDIBILITY

What about this source makes it believable? (Or not?)

How does the source know about this information?

Why should I believe him/her?

Key element: TRUST

Author's Credentials

- ✓ Education, training, experience – biographical information present or title of employment?
- ✓ Contact information – e-mail, snail mail, address, phone number
- ✓ Organizational authorship from a known and respected organization
- ✓ Author's position

Evidence of Quality Control

- ✓ Information presented on organizational web site
- ✓ On-line journals that use peer reviewing
- ✓ Meta-information
 - Two types: summative and evaluative
 - Summative:** all shortened forms of information such as abstracts, content summaries, or tables
 - Evaluative:** information that includes all types that provide some judgement or analysis of content.

Indicators of Lack of Credibility

- ✓ Anonymity
- ✓ Lack of Quality Control
- ✓ Negative meta-information. (ALL reviews being critical.)
- ✓ Bad grammar

ACCURACY

Goal: information is correct, up to date, factual, detailed, and exact

Timeliness

- ✓ Note WHEN information was created. Is this still of value?

Comprehensiveness

- ✓ All possible information
- ✓ Are sources listed?

Audience and Purpose

- ✓ Whom was the source intended and for what purpose?
- ✓ Bias present? Information with bias is not necessarily inaccurate, but must take bias into account.

Indicators of Lack of Accuracy

- ✓ No date
- ✓ Vague or sweeping generalities
- ✓ Old date on information known to change rapidly
- ✓ Very one sided view that does not acknowledge other views

REASONABLENESS

Goal: a source that engages the subject thoughtfully and reasonably, TRUTHFUL

Fairness

- ✓ Selection offers a balanced, reasoned, argument, not slanted
- ✓ Pay attention to the tone and emotion in writing

Objectivity

- ✓ Writer control biases?
- ✓ Some organizations are naturally biased
- ✓ Any conflict of interest issues?

Moderateness

- ✓ Test of the information against the real world

Consistency

- ✓ No contradiction in information

World View

- ✓ Author's view of the world (political, economic, religious and philosophical) influences writing

Indicators of Lack of Reasonableness

- ✓ "Put downs" (stupid jerks)
- ✓ Overclaims (Thousands of children are killed everyday in the United States)
- ✓ Sweeping Statements (This is the most important idea ever conceived!)
- ✓ Conflict of Interest

SUPPORT

Goal: evidence for the claims made, a source you can triangulate (find at least two other sources to support statement)

Source Documentation

- ✓ Where did this come from?
- ✓ Sources did the creator use?
- ✓ Bibliographical data?

Corroboration

- ✓ Three sources that agree?

External Consistency

- ✓ Compares familiarity and factualness with information already known to new information
- ✓ Assumes that if there are errors in known material, must be errors in new material.

Indicators of a Lack of Support

- ✓ Statistics presented without identified source for them
- ✓ Absence of source documentation
- ✓ Lack of other sources to back up

Resources on the web:

http://www.sccu.edu/faculty/R_Harris/evalu8it.htm

<http://www.unc.edu/cit/tips/eval.htm>