

# Evaluating Print Sources

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When conducting research, it is important to properly evaluate your sources before including them in your paper. The first place to look is at the bibliographic citation, which includes author, title, and publication information. By analyzing this information first, you are better able to determine the usefulness of the source for your paper.

## **Author**

- What is the author's educational background?
- Does the author have expertise in the subject area in which he/she is writing?
- Has the author written other material (articles, books, etc.) on the same subject? On a different subject?
- What is the author's institutional affiliation? (Where does he/she work?)
- This information can sometimes be found in the publication itself, or it may be on the website. You may need to conduct a separate search of the author's name to find out about his/her credibility.

## **Date of Publication**

- When was the source published?
- Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Some subject areas (such as science and medicine) require more up-to-date material, whereas other subject areas (such as those in the humanities) often require material from years past.

## **Edition or Revision**

- Is this an edition other than the first? If so, it may mean that the information was revised and updated.
- Is this a reprinted version? If so, the content may not be updated, but reprints indicate that the copy is popular or has become a standard source in the field.

## **Publisher**

- Note the publisher. If a university press publishes the source, the material is probably scholarly. Keep in mind, however, that while the reputation of the publisher does not guarantee that the source will be valuable, it does indicate that the publisher regards the source highly.

## **Type of Periodical**

- Is this journal scholarly?
- Are articles written by noted scholars in the field?
- Are sources cited? Is there a references section for each article?
- Is the journal peer reviewed? Peer reviewed (refereed) journals are those that require their articles to be reviewed by other scholars or experts in the field. These reviewers must approve of the article before it is published.
- You may consult Ulrich's Web (<http://www.ulrichsweb.serialssolutions.com/>), which will give you publication information and identify the journal as scholarly or other.
- When distinguishing between scholarly journals or other types of (less scholarly) periodicals, you may look at other factors, including: advertisements, graphic design, length and depth of articles, academic (or other) language, and intended audience.

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# Evaluating Print Sources

After evaluating the bibliographic information, you should continue evaluating your source by looking at elements of the source itself. Begin by previewing all sections of the text, including the preface, table of contents, introduction, abstract, references, and any other sections included in the text. By previewing these sections before reading, you are acquainting yourself with the material. Following this, make note of specific sections that will be useful to you in your research. Note the presence of references, and look at other (possibly related) articles included in a journal.

## Audience

- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the source aimed at a general or more specific audience?
- Does the source seem too advanced for your needs? Too technical? Too basic?

## Objective Reasoning & Coverage

- Try to distinguish whether the information presented is fact or opinion.
  - Fact: something that can be verified.
  - Opinion: a view or judgment, not necessarily based on factual information.
- Is the information well researched? Are opinions supported by facts or evidence?
- Does the author appear to be impartial? Is the argument objective?
- How often is pathos used as an appeal? (Is the author trying too hard to appeal to your emotions? Using emotional language?)
- How does the information covered in this article compare with arguments you've read in similar research? Is there a drastic departure?
- Is the material covered completely, or only marginally? Is the counterargument addressed?
- Does the work contain new information? Does it add new information to the field?
- Is the material primary, secondary, or tertiary?
  - Primary: original material or raw data (such as letters, speeches, interviews, etc.).
  - Secondary: interpretations or evaluations of primary source material (such as scholarly journals, encyclopedias, textbooks, etc.).
  - Tertiary: a collection of primary and secondary sources (such as almanacs and bibliographies).

## Writing Style & Organization

- Is the information in the source organized logically? Does one idea clearly lead to the next?
- Is there a sense of unity or cohesion to the text?
- Are points presented clearly? Is there any repetition?
- Is the text easy to read?

## Evaluations or Reviews

- Are you able to find a review or evaluation of this source?
- Is the review positive? What criticism is included?
- Do reviewers agree on the value of the source? Has the source caused controversy?

The information for this handout was compiled from the following sources:

Engle, M. (2011, April 5). Distinguishing scholarly journals from other periodicals. Retrieved from <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill20.html>

Ormondroyd, J. (2011, April 5). Critically analyzing information sources. Retrieved from <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill26.htm>

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