

Learning how to critically evaluate information resources is an essential skill for students undertaking academic research. This guide is a starting point for evaluating information resources.

The following evaluation techniques apply to both internet resources and more traditional formats such as journals, newspapers, magazines and books.

It is necessary that you cite correctly any information sources that you use. For more information about plagiarism see the How-to guide “Avoiding Plagiarism”

<http://www.library.uq.edu.au/training/plagiarism.html>

<p>How did you find the information?</p>	<p>Where you found the information will help you determine its usefulness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surfing the web, e.g. Google? • Using the Library catalogue? • Using one of the databases on the Library’s Databases gateway? • Using a gateway to academic websites?
<p>What is the coverage and relevance?</p>	<p>The depth of coverage is a good indication of the usefulness of information. Is it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving facts that you already know are correct? • Coming from a trusted source such as a subject database that stores peer-reviewed articles aimed at scholars and researchers? • Covered in appropriate depth or only at a superficial level? • Relevant to your research topic?
<p>Who is the intended audience?</p>	<p>Determining the intended audience will help decide the usefulness of the information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the intended audience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Other academics or scholars ○ General public • Is it aimed at a particular age group e.g. children, teenagers? • Is there an intended bias towards particular belief groups?
<p>What is the purpose of the information?</p>	<p>Determining the information’s purpose will help decide the usefulness of the information. Is it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to sell a project or service? • Presenting research findings?
<p>What level of language is used?</p>	<p>Language is a good indication of the usefulness of information. Is the language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of a high scholarly order? • Inflammatory, sensational? • Low level or inappropriate for that particular discipline?
<p>How up to date is it?</p>	<p>Some subject areas such as medicine demand a very high level of current information. Other in subject areas such as literature or art information published several years ago may be just as valuable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information up to date? • Do newer editions/revisions exist?

Does it have a bibliography?	<p>The presence of a bibliography is one indication of quality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author provide sources for facts used and are those sources recognisable as reliable e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics? • What types of references have been used to support the document – scholarly sources (journal articles, books, conference papers) or popular sources? The types of references indicate the level of research for the information.
Who is the author?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the author named? Are the author's qualifications / credentials / professional affiliations given? • Can you identify an institution, if any, to which the author belongs? • Is contact information for the author included or easily accessible? • Has your lecturer mentioned this particular author?
Who published it?	<p>Reputable publishers normally produce reputable information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know the publisher's reputation? • What type of information does this publisher usually produce?

Evaluating Websites

You should apply the evaluation techniques above to any information you find on the Internet. You need to cite information from the Internet as you would any other information.

It is often difficult to evaluate the quality of information retrieved from the Internet. Although there is a lot of information; not all of it is useful, accurate, up-to-date, unbiased, and/or appropriate for your research. The following are some extra indicators for you to consider:

- Who is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the website?
- Are other information and links provided?
- Is the site subject to influences over content e.g. a commercial organisation, a political organisation?
- Are the pages current and updated regularly?
- Is the site user-friendly? Is there an index or site map or other navigation links to the site information?
- Is the layout of the site professional or amateurish?
- Take note of the web address domain information – some widely recognized examples:
 - **.gov** – government site
 - **.com** – commercial site
 - **.edu** / **.ac** – educational institution
 - **.org** – organisation (Note: Not all **.org** sites are the official sites. Checking information “*About us*” on the site will often alert you to this.)
 - **.net** – networks, some organisations, Internet Service Providers
- More information about domains: <http://www.icann.org/en/tlds/>
- Identifying the country from the web address can be useful. Many domains are based on the two-character ISO country codes, such as ".fr" for France, "au" for Australia. Go to <http://www.answers.com/topic/country-code-top-level-domain> for a list of country codes.