

Evaluating Information Sources

As a student, you will be gathering information from a variety of types of sources for your research projects including books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, specialized databases, and websites. As you examine each source, it is important to evaluate each source to determine the quality of the information provided within it. Common evaluation criteria include: purpose and intended audience, authority and credibility, accuracy and reliability, currency and timeliness, and objectivity or bias. Each of these criteria will be explained in more detail below.



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Purpose and intended audience

- What is the purpose of the source? For example:
 - To provide information (e.g., newspaper articles)
 - To persuade or advocate (e.g., editorials or opinion pieces)
 - To entertain (e.g., a viral video)
 - To sell a product or service (e.g., advertising or marketing materials on a company website)
- Who is the intended audience? For example:
 - Scholars and academic researchers with specialized knowledge
 - The general public (without specialized knowledge)
 - Students in high school, college or university (e.g., textbooks for students learning a new subject).

Authority and credibility

- Who is the author?
 - Is it a person?
 - Is it an organization such as a government agency, non-profit organization, or a corporation?
- What are the qualifications of the author?
 - What is the author's occupation, experience, or educational background?
 - Does the author have any subject matter expertise?
 - Is the author affiliated with an organization such as a university, government agency, nonprofit organization, or a corporation?
- Who is the publisher?
 - For books, is it a university press or a commercial publisher? These types of publishers use editors in order to ensure a quality publication.
 - For journals or magazines, can you tell if it is popular or scholarly in nature?
 - For websites, is it an organizational website, or a personal blog?

Accuracy and reliability

- Is the information well researched?
 - Are there references (e.g., citations, footnotes, or a bibliography) to sources that will provide evidence for the claims made?
 - If the source includes facts or statistical data, can this information be verified in another source?

- If the data was gathered using original research (such as polling or surveys), what was the method of data collection? Has the author disclosed the validity or reliability of the data?

Currency and timeliness

- When was the information published?
 - For books and articles - you should be able to easily verify the publication date.
 - For websites, try to determine the date the web page was created or updated
- Is current information required? If not, then accurate, yet historical, information may still be acceptable.

Objectivity or bias

- Does the source contain opinions or facts?
- Is the information presented in the source objective (unbiased) or subjective (biased)?
- Does the information promote a political, religious, or social agenda?
- Is advertising content (usually found in business magazines or newspapers) clearly labelled?

In Summary

- Does the source provide you with high-quality information? Is the information useful in answering your questions and meeting your information need?

Adapted from Burkhardt, J.M & MacDonald, M.C. (2010). Teaching information Literacy: 50 standards-based exercises for college students. Chicago: American Library Association.

Evaluating Internet Sources With RADAR

Relevance - How is this information relevant to your assignment?

Authority - Who is the author? What makes this person or organization an authoritative source?

Date - When was this information published and is the publication date important to you?

Appearance - Does the information look professional or academic? Does it have citations and references?

Reason for writing - Why did the author publish this information?

Adapted from [Mandalios, J. \(2013\). RADAR: An approach for helping students evaluate Internet sources. *Journal of Information Science*, 39\(4\), 470-478.](#)

Source : <https://researchguides.library.brocku.ca/external-analysis/evaluating-sources>



[British Columbia](#)

Old growth forests more valuable standing: study

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Some things may be more valuable dead than alive, but not B.C.'s old growth forests, according to a Simon Fraser University study.

The study, by associate professor Duncan Knowler, has found that trees are far more valuable for their role in capturing carbon from the atmosphere than they would be if they were sold for timber.

As cap-and-trade systems measuring carbon levels gain acceptance, Knowler said, B.C. could find itself with a significant revenue source as long as the trees are standing.

He said his study is being conservative in its assessment of their potential value and doesn't even begin to tally the importance of old growth trees in purifying water and protecting fish habitat.