



Evaluating Information

Why do you need to evaluate information?

We have entered the Information Age and are inundated daily with data from many sources in a variety of forms. Each year the number of books and journals published increases. In 1992, 49,276 books were published in the United States alone. A daily edition of The New York Times includes more information than the average person in the 18th century would come across in a lifetime. People can watch television 24 hours a day on more than 1,064 stations. Thousands of radio stations broadcast nonstop worldwide and modern communication technology allows immediate news everywhere. Electronic publishing assaults computer users with a never ending array of information.

In this data-rich environment, information consumers must learn to cope with information anxiety and to sift through the information for sensible decision making. The following checklist of questions can be used as a guide to evaluate information in print, audiovisual or electronic formats.

Identifying Your Information Needs

- What information do you need?
 - What do you already know about the subject?
 - Do you have any preconceived ideas or biases on the topic?
 - Do you want general or specialized information?
 - What is the central focus of your information need?
 - How much information do you want to gather?
 - What types of information do you want?
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Evaluating the Source of the Information

- How did you find the source of information?
 - Did you use an index?
 - A review of references from other works?
- What type of source is it?
 - Is it scholarly?
 - Popular?
 - Governmental?
 - Private?
- What are the author's or producer's qualifications for this topic?
 - Education?
 - Experience?
 - Occupation?
 - Position?
 - Affiliation?
 - Publications?

- When was the information published?
 - Is it a first edition?
 - A revision?
 - A reprint or a rerun?
 - In which country was it published or produced?
 - What is the reputation of the publisher, producer or distributor?
 - Is it a university?
 - An alternative press?
 - A private / political organization?
 - Was the material reviewed or edited for publication?
 - Does the source show political or cultural biases?
 - Is a bibliography or other form of documentation included?
 - What is the best format for accessing the information, considering cost, time, ease of use?
 - Is it organized so you can easily access the information you require?
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Determining if the Information is Suitable for Your Needs

- What is the scope and purpose of the work?
 - For what audiences is it intended?
 - General public
 - Students
 - Professionals
 - Is the information in the most appropriate format for your topic?
 - Print
 - Slide
 - Film
 - Audio
 - Electronic
 - Can the data be transferred or manipulated electronically?
 - Is it presented clearly and objectively?
 - Is it suitable for your level of understanding of the subject, or is it too simple or too difficult?
 - Are you able to retrieve the information needed through tables of contents, indexes or other locators?
 - Does it have the feature you need?
 - Graphs
 - Charts
 - Tables
 - Glossaries
 - Maps
 - Illustrations?
 - Does it contain the information you need?
 - Is the information current enough for your topic or do you need historical information?
 - What is the geographic coverage or orientation?
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Evaluating the Information Content

- What is the author's thesis or purpose?
- What are the main points or concepts?
- What facts and opinions are presented?
- Are various points of view represented?

- Is this a report of primary research?
 - Surveys
 - Experiments
 - Observations
- Is it a compilation of information gathered from other sources?
- Is the source organized in a logical manner for the subject?
- What are the major findings?
- Are the conclusions justified by the information presented?
- Is there adequate documentation
 - Bibliography
 - Footnotes
 - Credits
 - Quotations
- Does this work update, substantiate or add to the knowledge on the subject?
- Is this information verified in other sources in the discipline?
- Do experts in the field agree on the findings?
- Do the findings support or refute your original ideas on the topic?