

Bracken Business Communications Clinic

The ABCs of Evaluating Information Resources

This guide was created by Greg Notess, Business Librarian, Montana State University Library. The guide can be accessed at <http://guides.lib.montana.edu/bmgt205/evaluation>

When evaluating information, consider the following four criteria:

- Authority
- Bias
- Content
- Currentness

Authority

Does this person/group know what they are talking about?

Why should you care?

- It can be pretty easy to get published. It is important to determine whether the author of a work is credible and knowledgeable about the field. Provide your reader with accurate information.

Tips for Evaluating Authority:

- What are the author's credentials?
- For which type of audience do the authors write?
- Do they have a record of conducting research in this area?

Bias

Is the research objective? Is it all opinion or are there facts?

Why should you care?

- If research is biased, you may be missing an entire side of an issue and not obtaining all of the information needed to present an accurate and clear picture. Sources should be based on research rather than opinion. Who's to say the author is right?

How can you tell whether a resource is objective?

- Read through the work and consider its content. Does it appear to only represent one side of an issue?
- Does it disregard pertinent information?

Content

Is there useful information on the website?

Why should you care?

- Your time is valuable. You don't want to waste time on a resource that is either repeating information that you already have or provides information on a superficial level.

How can you tell if a website has useful content?

- Is the research relevant to your topic?
- Does it provide new information?
- How does it relate to existing literature on the topic?
- Are the author's arguments convincing?

Currentness

How recent is the information?

Why should you care?

- Older information may have been superseded by new research. Provide your reader with current and accurate information. NOTE: There may be times when you need to include older research (e.g. an individual founded a theory 50 years ago on which all other research has been based).

How can you tell if a work is current?

- Check the publication date.
- Locate a date on the website: The date can either indicate when the information was initially published or last updated. Ideally you want to verify when the site was last updated. You can also do this by looking at the dates when an announcement or document was posted.
- Check the links: Are the links current and pointing to existing pages? If links lead you to an error message, there is a good chance that the owner is not updating the site very frequently.