

## Evaluating Books and Articles

When conducting academic research, you need to be discerning when deciding to trust and use an information source. As with information from the Internet, information from books and articles should be carefully evaluated. Use the five criteria below to help determine if your resource is credible.

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### Purpose/Type of Information

- Why was this book/article written?
- Is the information presented to share knowledge or personal opinions, give a factual report, create personal gain, provide an overview of something, share research, persuade the reader, sell something, or prove a point?
- Is this resource an *objective* work that presents all sides of the argument, or a *subjective* work, presenting only certain viewpoints, biases, or opinions?
- What aspects of your topic does this book or article *not* cover?
- Can you determine how the research was funded? Is there a conflict of interest?
- Is this information scholarly, governmental, popular, or from a business?
- Can you tell if the information is intended for the general public or for a scholarly audience of academics and researchers?
- Is the language and writing style understandable, intended for a specialized audience, or needlessly technical and complex?

### Author's Credentials

- Has the author written other materials on this subject? Were those materials well-received?
- Has the author earned a graduate degree in the area he/she is writing about? Does he/she conduct research or teach classes in this subject area?
- What is the author's background? Has he/she won any awards or honors?
- Does the author work for an organization affiliated or concerned with, or potentially benefited by, the subjects that the author is writing about?

### Publisher's Credentials

- What do you know about this publisher? Does the publisher have a solid reputation for publishing scholarly works? An editorial policy?
- Is the publisher a large commercial, small independent, university, or alternative press?
- Publisher information is usually located on the title page or on an article's abstract page in a database. Explore publishers' websites (if available)—read more about what types of work they publish, their editorial policies, and their position in the publishing world.

<b>University Press</b>	Non-profit, specialize in scholarly or academic works. Affiliated with an institute of higher education.
<b>Academic Press</b>	For-profit, specialize in scholarly or academic works. Not affiliated with an institute of higher education.
<b>Commercial Publisher</b>	Most publishing houses are commercial. Publish materials ranging from children's fiction to scholarly works.

<b>Small/ Independent Publisher</b>	Publish non-mainstream works from little known authors; usually provide editing and marketing.
<b>Government Agencies</b>	Publish country-related information (economic, political, social etc.); may include a political agenda or bias.
<b>Alternative Press</b>	Publish works on non-mainstream and alternative topics; can contain strong opinions or bias.
<b>Professional/Trade Association</b>	Publish material related to their professions—can include research or works by members of their associations.
<b>Vanity Press or Self-Published</b>	The author paid for his/her work to be published—often lacks outside review or editing.

### Information Sources/Citations

- Can you tell if the information is documented fact or simply opinions?
  - Watch for articles that are editorials or opinion pieces.
- Is the information in this source similar to information found in other credible sources?
- Where did the author gather information for this work?
  - Look for a bibliography, footnotes, or endnotes. Do those sources look reliable? Are they primary or secondary sources? Did the author use the latest sources available or are they much older than the work itself?
- Did the author conduct original research, or include experiments, observations, or interviews?

### Timeliness

- How current does the information need to be for your topic?
- Inaccurate and outdated information often lurks in older books and articles. When researching a topic that changes constantly or demands only current information—such as in the fields of medicine or computer technology—it is important to pay attention to the timeliness of the materials you use.
- Copyright date usually located on the title page of books; cover or contents page for articles.

### Other Helpful Hints

Use book review resources.

- The following databases allow you to restrict your search to only book review articles. Ask a librarian how.
  - [Academic Search Premier](#)
  - [EBSCO MegaFILE](#)
  - [Expanded Academic ASAP](#)
  - [Literature Resource Center](#)
- Through Saint Mary's University's database subscriptions, you have access to:
  - [The American Book Review](#)
  - [Booklist](#)
  - [History: Reviews of New Books](#)
  - [Internet Journal of Book Reviews](#)
  - [Library Journal](#)
  - [The New York Times Book Review](#)
  - [Publishers Weekly](#)
  - [Magill Book Reviews](#)