EVALUATING YOUR SOURCES

To evaluate the quality of the information you have found as a possible source for you to use for your paper, check to see if the book, periodical article, or website meets the following criteria. Books and periodical literature undergo an editorial process (the material is reviewed by others before publication; some processes are more rigorous than others), websites, however, do not necessarily go through this process. Anyone can publish anything on the web, there is no editorial control. Therefore, it is especially crucial for you to CAREFULLY evaluate what you find on the web.

Criteria for Evaluation

❖ Authority:
  o Individuals who are responsible (authors and/or editors) are easily identified and their credentials are stated.
  o A print source will have these credentials listed in the front matter of the work. A quality website will have this information either at the bottom, top, or in another link on the page.
  o If in doubt, you can check the website of the sponsoring institution and see if the individual is listed in the staff directory.
  o You can determine the author’s area of expertise by checking the databases to see other books/articles written by the author (search by author’s name)

❖ Audience:
  o Intended audience can be general (language is fairly simple)
  o Or academic or professional (sophisticated language, technical terms or jargon).

❖ Relevancy:
  o In books, look at the table of contents and the index to see how, where, and how well your topic is covered. Read the author’s introduction and/or preface. The author should clearly state his thesis and purpose for writing the book.
  o For scholarly journal articles, most of the databases provide an abstract of the article; this will give you a brief summary. The author’s thesis should be clearly stated in the abstract or within the first or second paragraph of the article. Newspaper and magazine articles tend to describe the content of the article within the first paragraph. Brief abstracts are also available via the databases.
  o For websites, look at the information appearing in the homepage, the ABOUT US link, or the MISSION STATEMENT.
  o For all sources, ask yourself if and how this information supports your thesis, or offers a different perspective or point of view.

❖ Purpose:
  o Information can be presented for a multitude of purposes; to inform, to persuade, to sell a point of view, to entertain.
  o Check to see if multiple points of view are presented or acknowledged and the author’s point of view is clearly stated.
  o In a print source, look at the preface or introduction.
In a website, look at the ABOUT US link or the MISSION STATEMENT link. Any bias or political ideology will be stated there. Beware of websites trying to sell a product or service. Advertising should be clearly separated from content.

❖ **Reliability:**
  - The authors should provide evidence to support claims. Look for footnotes, endnotes and/or bibliographies (aka List of Works Cited, Reference List). Look at the sources that the author is relying upon for reliability. Claims should be supported with research.
  - Information located on a website should be complete and free of grammatical, typographical, and factual errors.

❖ **Timeliness:**
  - Print sources will contain a copyright date or date of publication. For a book this date will appear on the verso to the title page. For a journal article, the issue will be numbered and dated.
  - Websites should include a current copyright/creation date or a revision date. These dates should be easily located. For a print source, the date is on the verso to the title page. For a website, the date is usually at the bottom of the page.
  - The information presented should be current for the topic being researched.
  - Links should work. Sites containing lots of dead links probably have not been updated in awhile.

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**Any Questions? Contact:**

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