

Evaluating Print and Web Sources

How to Evaluate Sources:

Use the following list to evaluate print and web sources:

Authority

- Who is the author?
- What are his or her qualifications?
- Who is the publisher?

Verifiability

- Are sources provided?

Timeliness

- Is the information current?
- When was it posted and/or updated?

Relevance

- Does the material contain substantiated generalizations?
- Is the source directly relevant to your research? Will it support or contradict your thesis in some way?

Bias

- Is the language emotional or inflammatory?
- Does the information represent a single opinion or a large range of opinions?
- Have you read other sources that contradict what this source is saying?
- What information has been included? Omitted?
- How does this information fit into what you already know about the topic?

Orderliness

- How is the page arranged and organized?
- Are underlying assumptions identifiable?
- Is the information consistent?

Clarity

- Is the information clearly stated?
- Does the author define important terms?
- Is it written in a professional manner and relatively free of mistakes?

Validity

- Do the facts presented support the conclusions?
- Are there gaps in the reasoning? (Fallacies!)

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Evaluating Web Sources

After you have used the checklist above, use the following criteria to help you evaluate web sources.

URL

- At the end of every top-tier web address a URL is listed. Common URLs include .gov, .edu, .com, .org, .info, .biz, .tv and more.
- The URL type is the first indication of what type of source it is (although these are not always entirely accurate representations of what material is contained within them.)
 - **.com** -- a commercial website. However, this is almost the “standard” formula, so many individuals or groups also have .com addresses.
 - **.org** – a website for an organization. Again, this is often used as the “alternative” to a .com address, so the lines can be blurred here.
 - **.gov** – a government website. .gov addresses cannot be registered by individuals, companies, or organizations, so they are a pretty safe bet that the information is published by a government agency (doesn't mean it's not biased!)
 - **.edu** – a website for an educational institution (anywhere from preschool to higher education). Many institutions provide personal webspace for their students and faculty, so this information can still be erroneous.

Publisher

- What organization maintains the information and the site?
- What individual is maintaining the site?

Author

- Does the author or organization maintain a list of credentials on the site?
- Is the author listed?

Quality and Graphics

- Quality can be misleading on the web. A good web designer does not equal a good researcher.
- Even so, the quality of a webpage can tell you something about potential quality of the information.

Links to More Information

- Are links provided to additional sources? If so, do they provide supportive or contradictory information?

You may also use the Purdue OWL to help you evaluate sources:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/553/01/>

(Adapted from “Using Empirical Research” by Dana Driscoll, Purdue University)