

Evaluating the Quality of Information, Cont.

About Peer Review

Peer-reviewed publications go through a review process in which the author's peers (fellow experts on the topic) judge the quality of the work and accept or reject the material for publication.

Comparing Information

The only way to evaluate the usefulness of your information is to compare it with related information. When you find a book, web site, or article, use it as a baseline with which to compare other sources of information. If you find a source with more in-depth information, references, quotes, etc., then it may become your baseline for comparison.

As you read through these sources, you are learning about your topic and getting a sense of what's already been written. You will begin to see recurring themes and issues and see where scholars disagree on an issue. Also, you will begin to judge what aspects of a topic are important or not important, and you'll see how different authors treat the subject.

Consider the Source

When looking at your sources, keep these questions about the author or publisher in mind:

- Is this a news article or an editorial?
- Is the author an expert on the subject?
- Does the author/publisher have a bias or agenda?
- Does the author give evidence for the content of the article? Can you find the information in other information sources?
- Do other information sources agree with the author or publisher?

Verifying Information

Comparing information to other sources also helps you verify data, opinions, or historical occurrences. If there is general agreement between various sources

(like scholarly sources, web sites, and books), then you can have confidence that the information is of high quality.

Summary

When evaluating sources for relevance and quality, keep these four things in mind:

1. Use sources that are likely to have the type of information you are looking for.
2. Start with quality resources like the ones selected by Library subject specialists.
3. Compare your information with other sources so that you can judge its relevance.
4. Use your comparisons to verify information so that you can have confidence in your sources.

Need More Help?

UT Arlington Library

Phone: 817-272-3394

<http://library.uta.edu/>

Papers Due Drop Inn—UT Arlington Library

Check web site for hours and location

<http://library.uta.edu/PDDI>

UT Arlington Writing Center

Location: Room 411, Central Library

Phone: 817-272-2601

<http://www.uta.edu/owl/index.htm>

Taken from Marc Meola, "Chuckling the checklist: A contextual approach to teaching undergraduates web-site evaluation," *Libraries and the Academy*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2004), pp. 331-344.

how to... Find and Evaluate Sources

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<http://library.uta.edu/howTo/>

When you gather research, you are trying to answer two questions. First, are you looking in the right place for the type of information you need? Second, does the information you found contribute to your overall knowledge of your topic?

Information Types and Locations

Know what kind of information you are looking for and where to find it. For example, you want to find out about the first Gulf War.

You Need	Questions You May Ask	Look Here
General overview information	When was the first Gulf War? Which countries were involved?	Web sites, encyclopedias <i>Encyclopedia of War and American Society</i>
Current event information	Did the American people support the first Gulf War when it started?	Web sites, newspapers, magazines <i>New York Times</i> <i>Time Magazine</i>
Lots of in-depth information	What types of weaponry were used? What are the historical roots of the conflict?	Books, journals, web sites www.pbs.org UT Arlington Library catalog
Specific data	How many first Gulf War disabled veterans received compensation in 1994 vs. 2001?	Dictionaries, directories, statistics LexisNexis Statistics Census Bureau

Finding Information

UT Arlington Online Catalog
<http://pulse.uta.edu/>

Use to find items UT Arlington Library owns. Examples include: scholarly and popular books, ency-

clopedias, government publications, DVDs, journals and magazines, newspapers.

UT Arlington Databases

<http://library.uta.edu/JDBC/DBs/dbAtoZ.jsp>

Use different databases to find newspaper articles, journal and magazine articles, broadcast transcripts, book reviews, statistical information.

About Different Types of Sources

Popular and Scholarly Sources

Popular information is created for all audiences and gives overviews of topics or information about current events. Authors may be journalists, professional writers, or amateurs.

Examples: Radio, newspapers, magazine articles, books not researched or written by experts

Scholarly information is created by experts, scholars, or practitioners and gives analysis and evaluation of topics in fields of research.

Examples: Professional journal articles, researched books, specialized encyclopedias

Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary sources are original works like research, paintings, plays, interviews, statistical tables, diaries,

letters, etc. The author is the writer/creator of the original work. Most disciplines publish their original research in journal articles. These articles are considered primary sources.

Secondary sources are critiques, descriptions, or reviews of original works. This includes critiques of plays, review articles that discuss somebody else's original research, etc. Secondary sources are written by someone other than the author of the original work. Books are usually considered secondary sources.

Finding and Getting Information from Other Libraries

To find materials at other libraries, search the WorldCat Database at <http://library.uta.edu/JDBC/DBs/dbAtoZ.jsp#w>

To borrow material from other libraries, use one of these options:

- Interlibrary Loan (ILL)- <http://library.uta.edu/policies/interlibraryLoan/>
- TexShare- <http://library.uta.edu/borrowing/privOtherLibs.jsp>

Evaluating the Quality of Information

Use Library Resources

The UT Arlington Library employs subject specialists to evaluate databases before purchasing them. While the specialists do not look at every article included in the database (which may number in the hundreds of thousands), when you use a database, book, or web site found through the UT Arlington web site, you know that it has already been reviewed by subject matter experts for

quality. Subject specialist librarians also list excellent resources on their online subject guides (<http://libguides.uta.edu/>). You can contribute to the evaluation process by rating their choices or suggesting other resources you found useful.

Another source of quality information is articles which appear in peer-reviewed journals. Some databases, like Academic Search

Complete, allow you to search specifically for peer-reviewed or scholarly articles. Other databases, like Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection, include only peer-reviewed journals. Either way, you can have confidence that the information you find in peer-reviewed sources meets the standards expected for its discipline.