

Evaluating Information Sources

Historical research is an integral part of a heritage trail project, and it is important to understand the sources of your information. Types of sources you may utilize include books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, websites and the story a grant aunt retells. As you examine each source, you need to evaluate the quality of the information provided within it. Common evaluation criteria include: purpose and intended audience, authority and credibility, accuracy and reliability, currency and timeliness, and objectivity or bias. Each of these criteria will be explained in more detail below.

Purpose and intended audience

- What is the purpose of the source? For example:
 - To provide information (e.g., newspaper articles)
 - To persuade or advocate (e.g., editorials or opinion pieces)
 - To entertain (e.g., a viral video)
 - To sell a product or service (e.g., advertising or marketing materials on a company website)
- Who is the intended audience? For example:
 - Scholars and academic researchers with specialized knowledge
 - The general public (without specialized knowledge)
 - Students in high school, college or university (e.g., textbooks for students learning a new subject).

Authority and credibility

- Who is the author?
 - Is it a person?
 - Is it an organization such as a government agency, nonprofit organization, or a corporation?
- What are the qualifications of the author?
 - What is the author's occupation, experience, or educational background?
 - Does the author have any subject matter expertise?
 - Is the author affiliated with an organization such as a university, government agency, nonprofit organization, or a corporation?
- Who is the publisher?
 - For books, is it a university press or a commercial publisher? These types of publishers use editors in order to ensure a quality publication.
 - For journals or magazines, can you tell if it is popular or scholarly in nature? See: [Peer-reviewed, popular magazine, or journal?](#)
 - For websites, is it an organizational website, or a personal blog?

Accuracy and reliability

- Is the information well researched?
 - Are there references (e.g., citations, footnotes, or a bibliography) to sources that will provide evidence for the claims made?
 - If the source includes facts or statistical data, can this information be verified in another source?
 - If the data was gathered using original research (such as polling or surveys), what was the method of data collection? Has the author disclosed the validity or reliability of the data?

Currency and timeliness

- When was the information published?
 - For books and articles - you should be able to easily verify the publication date.
 - For websites, try to determine the date the web page was created or updated
- Is current information required? If not, then accurate, yet historical, information may still be acceptable.

Objectivity or bias

- Does the source contain opinions or facts?
- Is the information presented in the source objective (unbiased) or subjective (biased)?
- Does the information promote a political, religious, or social agenda?
- Is advertising content (usually found in business magazines or newspapers) clearly labelled?

In Summary

- Does the source provide you with high-quality information? Is the information useful in answering your questions and meeting your information need?

Adapted from Burkhardt, J.M & MacDonald, M.C. (2010). Teaching information Literacy: 50 standards-based exercises for college students; Chicago: American Library Association.

Evaluating Internet Sources With RADAR

Relevance - How is this information relevant to your project?

Authority - Who is the author? What makes this person or organization an authoritative source?

Date - When was this information published and is the publication date important to you?

Accuracy - Where are they getting their information from? Does it have citations and references? Are they using reputable sources or explaining how they gathered their data?

Reason for writing - Why did the author publish this information?

Adapted from: Mandalios, J. (2013). RADAR: An approach for helping students evaluate Internet sources. *Journal Of Information Science*, 39(4), 470-478.

For more information on RADAR, visit this Loyola Marymount University website: [RADAR Framework - Evaluating Sources: Using the RADAR Framework - LibGuides at Loyola Marymount University \(lmu.edu\)](#)