

# EVALUATING POTENTIAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Not all information sources are equally good ones to use in your writing or presentations. You should carefully consider the sources you are going to use - each one should provide correct information, should be written by someone who knows something about the topic, and should contribute to your understanding of the topic. Below are some questions to ask yourself about potential sources when deciding whether to use them.

## Authority & Credibility

- Who is the author?
- What makes the author an authority on this subject? Does the author cite his/her experience/credentials?
- Is there any way to contact the author?
- Is the page part of a larger site? Who is responsible for this site?
- Is the site accredited or endorsed by a reputable organization?
- Is the page a peer-reviewed or scholarly article?
- Does the page contain footnotes? Is material taken from other sources fully credited?

## Scope, Coverage & Relevance

- Who is the intended audience? (general, specialized readership, scholars, etc.)
- What is the level of the material? (basic, advanced, etc.)
- Are the content and level appropriate for your assignment?
- What time period is covered?
- What geographical area is covered?
- Is this information a part of larger source? If so, who shortened this source, and why?

## Bias & Accuracy

- How is the information presented? (fact, opinion, propaganda, etc.)
- If presented as fact, is it accurate?
- Is there a bias? (cultural, political, religious, etc.)
- If so, is the bias clearly stated?

## Currency / Timeliness

- What is the resource's date of publication, or date of posting to the Web?
- Does this date tell when the resource was created, or when it was last updated?
- How recent is the information contained in the source?  
How frequently is the source updated?
- Is some of the information obviously out of date?  
Too old for your needs?

## Quality

- What was the quality of the research methodology?
- Did it use accepted methodologies for its field, insofar as you know?
- Is the information clearly written and well-organized?
- Is new research being reported or is the author reviewing previously conducted research?
- Does the author agree or disagree with the majority of other scholars in the discipline?
- Is this the first resource of its kind within its discipline?

## Commercialism

- Is the presenter selling something - a product, a philosophy, himself/herself?
- Does the resource/page have a corporate sponsor?
- Are there any hidden costs?
- Do you have to enter personal identification in order to proceed?