

Info skills

Top tips for evaluating information



Introduction

It is absolutely essential to evaluate the quality of any information you want to use in your assignment. You need to develop critical thinking skills in order to make the right judgements about any source you want to use.

If you have a reading list, the quality and level of this information is assured by your lecturer who is very familiar with that subject area. In general, the resources you find through the UEL library will give you good quality information. However, you need to learn how to evaluate information for yourself as you search for additional resources to support an argument, examine particular aspects of a topic, or later for research projects.

Evaluation criteria

When you evaluate information you need to think critically about who wrote it and why, how relevant it is for your needs and whether it is sufficiently up-to-date. Not all information is good quality information. You will lose marks if you use poor quality information in your assignments.

Authorship

- Always check the credentials of the author/organisation whose work you are reading.
 - Is this person known and respected in their field?
 - Do they have academic status such as Doctor, Professor or Reader?
 - Have they published widely on this subject?
 - Have other authors cited them?
 - Are they working for or sponsored by an organisation?
 - Could they have a reason for trying to convert you to their point of view?
 - Is the material produced by an organisation that is trying to sell something?
- Scanning the Library Search for other books by an author will give some indication of their authority.
- Check the objectivity of information; compare it with similar articles published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- In general, text books are carefully reviewed but, you still need to use your critical thinking skills when reading books as they may contain biased information.

Relevance

- Even good quality information needs careful examination to make sure it is directly relevant to your assignment topic.
- If your assignment topic is new to you, it is useful to read introductory texts on that topic to get a general understanding.

- Abstracts are a quick, easy way to see the main topics and angles of a book or journal article without needing to look through it all.
- Think about the scope and the focus of any piece of information. Does the information you have found match what you need?
- You should also think about the level of the information. A PhD thesis might be too advanced but something written for GCSE students will be too basic.
- Remember, even information of the highest quality may not necessarily be relevant for your current topic and from that point of view should not be used.

Currency

- The date of publication will help you decide whether a source is current or out-of-date.
- Check when a book was published by looking for the copyright date. Make sure you are reading the latest edition of a book.
- Journal articles also show their date of publication and almost always contain more up-to-date information than books.
- Websites usually have a date in their copyright notice at the bottom of the page.
- Currency depends on your subject. Fast-changing fields within Computing and Science may require more up-to-date materials than Humanities and Social Sciences, which often have classic texts that it is important to read.
- If your assignment has a historical context, then you will need to use both new and old information and, in this case, the older information is not out-of-date.
- You should always check whether the information you have found is the most up-to-date available on that topic by searching carefully for newer resources of all types.

Getting more help

If you need more advice on the suitability of a resource, ask at the library enquiry desk, consult your [Subject Librarian](#) or use the online [Ask-A-Librarian](#) service.