



## Evaluating Research Sources

### Is this source good enough?

In today's world of technology just about anyone can find a wealth of information on just about any topic. The challenge comes in selecting appropriate and reliable sources. Just because a book, article, or web page matches the search criteria and seems to be relevant, does not mean it is an appropriate or reliable source of information. Given that all sources are not created equal, learning to analyze and evaluate critically is an important part of the research process.

**Helpful hint for your academic life:**

**If a source is “good enough” it is probably not good enough.**

Although subtle differences are involved when evaluating different types of resources, there are basic questions to be considered with all.

### **Authority**

Who is the author(s) and what are his or her credentials?

- What is the author's educational background and experience?
- With what institutions or organizations is the author affiliated?
- Who published or disseminated the information?

Is there adequate documentation? (references, bibliography, credits, footnotes)

### **Content**

Is this a report of primary research? (surveys, experiments, studies, etc.)

Is it a compilation of information gathered from other sources?

What evidence or supporting documentation is presented? Does the data support the conclusion?

Are arguments and supporting evidence presented clearly and logically?

Is the topic covered comprehensively, partially, or is it a broad overview?

Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?

### **Relevancy**

How current is the text? Currency is important for some topics, less so for others.

What type of audience is the author addressing? Is it aimed at a specialized or a general audience?

Is this source appropriate for your needs?

- too general
- too elementary
- too superficial
- too specific
- too advanced
- too technical

### **Objectivity**

Are the author's appeals based on logic or are they appeals to the readers' emotions?

Are issues treated in a factual manner?

Who is the intended audience?

What is the purpose of the information? Is a government, educational, or research group providing information? Is a person or group trying to sway public opinion?

# Evaluating Periodical Literature

A periodical is any publication published on a regular basis (periodically). This includes newspapers, magazines and journals.

Frequently periodicals are divided into two categories: Scholarly or Non-scholarly, though it might be more useful to consider three categories: **Scholarly, Professional or Popular**. These categories are not definitive and opinions as to where a journal or an article falls will differ. Your professor must be the final authority on what is considered appropriate and acceptable for your assignment. Understanding the differences between, and being able to identify, the various types of periodicals is crucial to the research process.

One major criteria to consider: is the journal **Peer-reviewed or Refereed**. When a journal is peer-reviewed it means that a panel of experts in the field has reviewed the journal article for quality and accuracy before it is accepted for publication.

**Note: Very nearly all scholarly journals are peer-reviewed, but not all peer-reviewed journals can be considered scholarly.**

Remember! Terminology can be tricky and definitions are not absolute. Refer to the list below for features which may help you identify sources which will be suitable for your assignment.

- **Scholarly** - Journals that present in-depth, original research and commentary on current developments within a specific field. These articles have been written by scholars in the field and reviewed by other scholars in the field for scholastic standards and validity.
- **Professional** - Journals focused on a specific field with articles written by someone who has the education and experience to be considered an authority. These articles might or might not be peer reviewed.
- **Popular** - Magazines and newspapers written for the general public by professional writers or journalists. Articles are generally short and provide a broad overview of a topic rather than in-depth analysis.

	 <b>Scholarly Journals</b>	 <b>Professional Journals</b>	 <b>Popular Magazines</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ peer-reviewed</li> <li>◦ contains original research</li> <li>◦ lengthy with in-depth analysis</li> <li>◦ uses scholarly/technical language</li> <li>◦ author credentials provided</li> <li>◦ cites sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ sometimes peer-reviewed</li> <li>◦ reports on developments/trends in discipline/industry</li> <li>◦ varied length articles</li> <li>◦ uses some technical language</li> <li>◦ author credentials may be provided</li> <li>◦ often cites sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ not peer-reviewed</li> <li>◦ covers current events &amp; pop culture</li> <li>◦ varied length articles</li> <li>◦ written for general public</li> <li>◦ seldom signed by author</li> <li>◦ rarely cites sources</li> </ul>
<b>Written by</b>	Scholars or researchers in the field who usually have an advanced degrees (PhD and/or Masters)	Scholars or professionals who have education and experience in the field	Journalists, freelance writers or publication's staff
<b>Written for</b>	Academic community	Academic and Professional community	General public
<b>Published by</b>	Scholarly societies or associations or by academic presses.	Professional associations, foundations	Mostly commercial companies