



Calumet College of St. Joseph Specker Library

Don't Believe Everything You Read. Ideas for Evaluating Information

No matter how information is presented, whether it's as a research article or a chapter in a book, it is important to read that information critically in order to evaluate it. The following ideas are *suggestions* to think about while reading. This is not an all-inclusive list nor will every idea be applicable to every source you read.

Nature of the Information and Documentation:

What is the nature of the information presented?

- Original data?
- Summaries of original data?
- Anecdotal information?
- Background information?
- Interpretation of original data and explanation of significance?
- Current or revised information?

What is the nature of the documentation?

- Is supporting evidence given?
- Are sources for that evidence clearly documented?
- Are sources for that evidence appropriate?
- What are the credentials of the sources?
- Are the sources current?

Are the conclusions reached by the author(s) justified by the information presented?

Is this information verified in other sources in the discipline?

Do experts in the field agree?

Purpose and Intended Audience

What is (are) the purpose(s) of the work?

- To describe (What happened)?
- To explain (Why did it happen)?
- To interpret (What does it mean)?
- To entertain?

Who is the intended audience?

- General reader?
- Professionals in the same discipline?
- Professionals in other disciplines?

Is the information in the most appropriate format for your topic and needs: print, electronic, media?

Is the information current enough for your topic or do you need historical information?

Evaluating the Source of the Information

What are the credentials of the author?

Is there an identified author(s)?

Did the author do the research?

Is the author someone who's working in the field?

What is the author's point of view?

Does the author have a bias?

Is a funding source or site for the research described or identified?

Does that funding source imply a bias?

What is the reputation of the publisher, producer or distributor?

University press?

Alternative press?

Private/political organization?

Does the work show political or cultural biases?

In which country was it published or produced?

Is there a particular geographic orientation?

If the source is a journal,

What are the credentials of the journal?

Is it peer-reviewed or edited?

What is the reputation of the journal?

Is it published by a professional association and if so, what do you know about the reputation of this association?

Is it published for profit?

What role does the profit motive play in the selection of articles for this journal/magazine?

Presentation and Style?

How is the information presented?

Is the research placed in a context (i.e. do you know why it was done?)?

Is the methodology stated with enough detail to be replicated?

Is the significance of the results clear?

What is the style of the source?

Is it well-written?

What is the nature of the language used?

What is the level of detail in the article?

Are the language and level of detail used appropriate for the intended audience and the purpose?

Does the work have the features you need: graphs, charts, tables, glossaries, maps, illustrations?

What is the purpose of the illustrations?

Do the illustrations have captions and are these clear and appropriate?