Evaluating Print Resources: A Checklist

In research, it can be difficult to tell what’s a good source and what’s a bad source. If you are starting with an academic library, then you are way ahead in the game because we have done a lot of that evaluation for you. Still, how do you know if you are looking at credible information or not? You need to validate it! Go through this checklist for print resources to see if you have something that is college-level or not.

Authority

- Does the information reference the author’s name, current position, academic degree, and/or biography?
- Is the author’s work/academic experience relevant to the topic, or are there other credentials to support his/her authority?
- Is the author or publisher affiliated with any reputable organizations, institutions, or associations?
- Is the information reviewed by other experts in the field before publication? (“peer-reviewed” or “referred”)
- [for articles] Does the information come from an academic journal or from a source with the word “journal” in the title? [Note: Not a universal rule – e.g., Ladies’ Home Journal and Wall Street Journal are not scholarly in nature]
- Was the information located by a reference from a selective index/database, rather than a “catch-all” or “comprehensive” index/database or search engine?
- Does the source list the publisher of the information? Is this publisher reputable?

Content

- Is the information current? Does the source have a publication, edition, or revision date?
- Does the author cite other experts in the field? If so, is a bibliography or a works-cited list provided?
- If citations are given, are they sufficiently clear so that someone else can follow up and verify the source of information?
- Is the information written with the language or “jargon” of the field of study?
- How long is the document? Is it kept shorter only to preserve the reader’s interest?
- Does the document present photos that are irrelevant to a scholarly study of the topic?
- If the information is a research document, does the author explain the process used to gather the data?
- Is the information well-written? Do editors review the information before publication?
- Is the author’s expected audience stated? Does the vocabulary used reflect the audience level?
- Are the facts accurate? Does the information hold up well when compared with other sources in the field?
- Does the author have a bias? If so, is he/she aware of it? Is it clearly articulated?
Is sufficient evidence presented to support the author’s conclusions? Are the conclusions logical?

Are you still not sure about the reliability of the document? Then, contact a librarian today! Like agents of the U.S. Treasury Department, we are professionally trained to spot “counterfeit currency” – when it comes to information. Please feel free to email us at research@sewanee.edu, call us at 931-598-3333, text us at 931-563-0198, make an appointment at http://library.sewanee.edu/appointments, or even come in to see us at G025 in duPont Library. We hope to hear from you soon!