RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION AND SOURCE RELIABILITY

"Decide what deserves your trust."

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Introduction
Why we need to select information?

Our time is sometimes described as "The Information Age". In 21st century, every person is surrounded by vast quantity of information. Our society often feels glutted by information spread by various media. Technological revolution of past few decades created global media, therefore apart of traditional forms of getting knowledge about actual issues such as newspaper or personal one; we are nowadays receiving information accompanied by unique audio-visual experience – in television or on the Internet.

The accessibility of general education allowed much more individuals and groups to inform the others about events around us as well as to create their own opinion about them and express it in public. *Mentality, technology and values of this century provided a base for such large information revolution as never before in history.* We live in countless points of views and ideas which deserve to be visible and be noticed. Every day we are confronted with subjective qualities as *truth* and we are supposed to distinguish *reality from subjectivity.* It is up to us to decide who and what deserves our trust and to look for the truth - responsibly and carefully.

In order to get to know the world and everything what happens around us in the most authentic way as possible, we should set strict criteria for what we trust. We should care more about what we consider relevant and we should effectively study every source and information. *Each research should be deep and complex, because that is how reality nowadays is.* This world offers us more than superficial or incorrect vision. Information age offers us the choice between real and unreal. You decide, you choose.

Everything what you produce should be based on some information. **Remember, if the basics are reliable and of high quality, the product will be the same.** Keep this in mind while writing your school work on any project. Here are some strategies for evaluating sources critically.

Reliable sources

1. Deciding whether the source is reliable

In the moment when you start searching for information, you have to choose your potential sources. As there are plenty of them, you should examine them with a critical eye. Smart researchers continually ask themselves two basic questions:

"Is this source relevant to my purpose?"
- This question will help you avoid losing time by researching sources which are not valuable for your current topic.

"Is this source reliable?"
-This question will help you determine appropriate and trustworthy sources.

Do small check list and ask yourself these two questions not to move away from your topic and reach relevant information.

2. Reliability and validity

Information sources may be varied. Do not forget they all are not equal. Especially Internet is likely to present information which are often misleading. But how can we identify reliable source in such a number of pages and publications? Always consider these facts about your source:

Accuracy
Are sources listed for the facts?
Has the site been edited for grammar, spelling, etc.?

Authority
Is the publisher reputable?
Is the sponsorship clear?
Is there a link to the sponsoring organization?
Is the author qualified to write on this topic?

To be sure your information source is reliable always verify facts you have reached.

This table should help you to choose appropriate source for your research.

Information Source	Best For:	The Information:	Watch For:
Books	- Comprehensive information about the topic - Background and historical information - Bibliography of other sources	- Often places an event into some sort of historical context - Can provide broad overviews of an event - Can be intended for a broad audience depending on the book, ranging from scholars to a general audience	- Dated information - Content level can range from general public to expert - Bias or slant (dependent on author)
Popular/Special Interest Magazine	- Current information - Shorter, easy to understand articles - Photographs and illustrations	- Is contained in long-form stories. Weekly magazines begin to discuss the impact of an event on society, culture and public policy - Can include detailed analysis of events, interviews, as well as opinions and analysis - Offers perspectives of an event from particular groups or geared toward specific audiences - Is intended for a general audience or specific non-professional groups	- Authors are usually not experts - Articles can lack depth - Sources not always cited - Editorial bias of a publication
Professional/Trade Magazines	- Specialized information related to a particular discipline or profession - Current information - Some bibliographies	- Is contained in long-form articles or reports - May provide context and analysis of an event as it relates to a specific interest group - Is intended for a professional organizations or groups with similar interests	- Article length can vary between short, easy to understand to lengthy and highly specific - Sources not always cited - Characteristics similar to both popular and scholarly sources sometimes make it difficult to recognize source type
Scholarly/Academic Journals	- In depth information - Articles written by experts - Charts and graphs - Recent research on a topic - Bibliographies of other sources	- Is often theoretical, carefully analyzing the impact of an event on society, culture and public policy - Is peer-reviewed - Often narrow in topic - Is intended for other scholars, researchers, professionals and university students in the field	- Terminology and depth of articles may be difficult to understand by novices - Dated information (sort your results by date if you are looking for the most recent information, as some journals extend back several decades)
Newspapers	- Daily information - Localized information and events - Beginning to apply chronology to an event and explain why the event occurred	- May include statistics, photographs and editorial coverage - Includes quotes from experts, government officials, witnesses, etc. - Is intended for a general audience	Authors usually not experts
Web Sites	- Government information - Varied points of view on a topic - Statistics - Company information	- Is primarily provided through resources like Internet news sites when related to a specific event - Explains the who, what, when and where of an event - Is intended for a general audience	- Credibility and accuracy cannot be assured (check for author credentials, publication date, etc.) - Information may be highly biased - Sources not always cited

3. Primary and secondary sources

By considering what kinds of sources are the most suitable for your topic you can conduct your research efficiently. We can identify two kinds of sources: primary and secondary.

1. Primary sources: the direct source of information. You will find here basic and crucial data or facts about your topic.

For example, if you write a paper about the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, the text of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights would be the primary source.

Other primary sources:
- *Research articles*
- *Literary texts*
- *Historical documents such as diaries or letters*
- *Autobiographies or other personal accounts*

2. Secondary sources: they are one step forward of the primary sources. Information is discussed, interpreted, analysed, consolidated or reworked. They can also show you different points of views concerning your topic.

For example, during researching a paper about the First Amendment, you might read articles about legal cases that involved First Amendment rights, or editorials expressing commentary on the First Amendment.

Other secondary sources:
- *Magazine articles*
- *Biographical books*
- *Literary and scientific reviews*
- *Television documentaries*

4. Trustworthy sources

Your research should be mainly based on primary, high-quality sources of information. They are carefully reviewed and written by experts. Prefer sources as:

- *Scholarly books and articles in scholarly journals – **sources need always to have an author** – someone respected in the field of the information*
- *Trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience*
- *Government documents, such as books, reports, and web pages*
- *Documents posted online by **reputable prestigious** organizations, such as universities and research institutions*
- *Textbooks and reference books (which are usually reliable but may not cover a topic in great depth)*

5. Unsuitable sources

Some sources should be better avoided. They can be written just to attract large audience or present subjective opinion. For example loosely supervised or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopaedias, talk radio shows, television news shows with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms. They can be easily manipulated and used for different kinds of propaganda. If you use them, make a detailed research about their reliability.

Relevance of information

Evaluation of relevant information

Apart from the source where the information comes from, when considering its relevance, it is required to bear in mind some other aspects of it. We offer you some useful questions to check credibility and relevance of particular information.

Accuracy and reality check

Can you verify the information through another source?
How does the new information fit with what is already known?
Are sources of factual information or statistics <u>quoted</u>?
Is there a bibliography included?

Remember complexity. Each research contributes to an existing body of knowledge. Deep and accurate research helps you to create a picture about reality. Always check more sources and compare statements.

Objectivity

May there be any commercial interest?
Is advertising included in some point?
Does the page exhibit a particular point of view or bias?

Sometimes the main goal of the author may be other than to inform you. Be careful and alert to commercial purposes and manipulative methods hidden in texts which may impact actual content. **Try to distinguish subjective opinions from relevant objective information.**

Currency

Is a publication date indicated?
Is the topic one that does not change frequently?
Are the links actual and functional?

The world is a dynamic place where everything can change very quickly. Do not forget to check the date and be topical.

Complexity

Are the topics covered in depth?
Does the content appear to be complete?

If the source misses any detail, it doesn't mean that you are supposed to ignore it. This point is related with the first one, since you can easily complete the information by further research.

Exercise

To practice, choose a topic of your research. We recommend you to work with a current issue or generally known affair – this would prove you easier beginning with advanced research. Feel free to adapt the exercise to your needs.

A.
Visit the website of your library (or prestigious one in your country) or consult with a reference librarian to determine what periodicals indexes or databases would be useful for your research. You can work as a group.

Depending on your topic, you may rely on a general news index, a specialized index for a particular subject area, or both. Search the catalogue for your topic and related keywords. Print out or bookmark your search results.

Identify at least one to two relevant periodicals, indexes, or databases.
Conduct a keyword search to find potentially relevant articles on your topic.
Save your search results. If the index you are using provides article summaries, read these to determine how useful the articles are likely to be.
Identify at least three to five articles to review more closely. If the full article is available online, set aside time to read it. If not, plan to visit our library within the next few days to locate the articles you need.

B.
Use an online search engine to conduct a web search on your topic. Refer to the tips provided earlier to help you streamline your search. Evaluate your search results critically based on the criteria you have learned. Identify and bookmark one or more websites that are reliable, reputable, and likely to be useful in your research.

Sources for further research

Here are some useful links for those who have understood how important the depth and spectrum of information are. Feel free to continue with your own studies and do not hesitate to use literature if there is any available. Good luck with being well informed!

http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/successful-writing/s15-04-strategies-for-gathering-relia.html

http://library.uaf.edu/ls101-evaluation

http://etc.usf.edu/techease/win/internet/how-can-my-students-know-if-a-web-source-is-reliable/

http://writingcommons.org/evidence/supporting-sources/630-what-might-be-a-more-credible-reliable-source

http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/webeval.html

http://www.mhhe.com/mayfieldpub/webtutor/judging.htm

https://www.asis.org/Conferences/AM09/open-proceedings/papers/15.xml

http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/selectingsources.html