



Evaluating Books and Articles for Academic Use

It is important to assess the quality of books and periodical articles *before* using them for academic research. Be aware that not every source belonging in a library is automatically appropriate for academic research. Libraries also have books and articles for entertainment purposes. Note: For information regarding evaluating Web-*only* sources, refer to the following Mission College Handout: *Evaluating Web Pages for Academic Research*.

Authority: What are the qualifications/credentials of the person or organization responsible for the book or article?

- Can you find/verify the author's qualification?
- Is the book publisher reputable?
- Is the periodical or periodical publisher reputable?

If you cannot determine the authority of the author or publisher, then you should not use it.

Accuracy: Is the information correct?

- Is there a bibliography or list of citations available?
- Is it clear who has responsibility for the information? Do they have expertise in the subject?

If there is no method for you to determine if the information in the source is accurate, or that the author/publisher has expertise in the subject, then you should not use it.

Coverage: Does the source adequately address your topic?

- Will the information in the book or article be helpful for your research?
- Does it include any new or useful information?

If the source does not cover your topic well or provide any new or useful information, then you should not use it.

Objectivity/Bias: Can you determine the objectivity of the book or article?

- Is there a slant, or bias?
- Does it try to sell a point of view or product?
- Is there an obvious purpose or audience?

If the book or article is not objective, it may still be okay to use it; it will depend on the purpose of your research and your ability to find other sources that present the opposing viewpoint.

Currency: When was the information published?

- What is the publication date?
- If material is presented in graphs and/or charts, is it clearly stated when the data was gathered?

If the information is not current, it may still be okay to use it, but it depends on your topic. For example, a current date is not required for most literary topics such as John Steinbeck and *The Joy Luck Club*, or for historical topics such as World War II or the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign.