EVALUATING INFORMATION SOURCES

Evaluating information sources is an important step in the research process. From books to journal articles, media reports and, of course, Internet sites, it is important to critically evaluate information before including it in your assignments. This checklist of crucial questions is intended to help you identify information sources that are reliable and appropriate.

Who is the author?
- Does he/she have any listed qualifications or credentials?
- Is the author affiliated with an organisation/university etc?

Has there been a review process?
- Is your article from a refereed (reviewed by peers) research journal?
- Is the publisher known in this field of study?

Is the information accurate?
- Can you verify the facts and statistics?
- Is there a bibliography of sources used?

Is the information objective?
- Is there a discernible bias – does the author seem to be promoting a particular idea and could this bias have affected research results?
- Is the information published by an organisation with a particular point of view?

Is the information current?
- Is this the most current information on your topic or is it too old to be pertinent?
  (This is very important in fields such as economics, science and technology but in subject areas such as history or literature, older materials may be just as valuable).
Is the content, style and tone appropriate for your purposes?  
Are you satisfied these aspects reflect the impression you want to convey and suit your audience?

Evaluating Internet sources

Evaluating sources found through an Internet search can be problematic. Remember, it’s easy to publish on the Internet, often without any review process. To help you find reliable information check the following details:

- Is there a named author or data custodian?
- Can you determine if the author is qualified to write about this topic?
- Are personal opinions being presented as facts?
- Are there any references/bibliographies which you can check?
- When was the site last updated – can you determine the timeliness of the information?
- Have images been used to make a point, and if so, decide whether they appear to be authentic (digital images can be easily manipulated)
- If you detect spelling and grammatical errors this could imply that the information has not been thoroughly checked for inaccuracies.
- If you have doubts about any information you retrieve, investigate additional sites on the topic
- Is there a mail-to link if you want to forward questions or comments?