

## SKILLS FOR LEARNING

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# GUIDE TO EVALUATING INFORMATION

### WHY DO I NEED TO EVALUATE INFORMATION?

To produce high quality academic work you need to use high quality information as evidence to support your statements and arguments. You need to be certain that this information is relevant, accurate, up to date and objective. Having a systematic approach to evaluating information will help ensure this.

### BEFORE YOU START

It is very difficult to find and evaluate information if you do not have a clear understanding of what information you need and how you intend to use it. Therefore you should make sure you know what your information needs are and that you are evaluating any information that you find in relation to those needs.

### WHERE DOES THE INFORMATION COME FROM?

You should be aware of the source of any information that you use in your work. If your information came from one of the resources we provide such as a books, e-books, journals and e-journals it will have been subjected to a formal publishing process which should ensure that the information is of a reasonable standard. However you should still be evaluating this information before you include it in your assignment.

The Internet can be a valuable source of information if used wisely. However, this information can vary in accuracy, reliability and value, and unlike information we provide the contents of many websites go through no formal publishing process. Websites are created for many different reasons and are not always suitable for academic purposes. It is essential to evaluate web material before making use of it in your work.

### HOW TO EVALUATE RESOURCES

Your decision to use a particular piece of information in your assignment should be based on careful consideration and evaluation. One way to do this is to use a checklist to assess the quality of your information. The CARS (Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness, and Support) checklist is designed to help you to separate high quality from poor quality information. The CARS Checklist asks you to consider a number of issues relating to the quality of your information. This checklist can be used for any kind of information.

## THE CARS CHECKLIST:

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Credibility:    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there evidence of the author's standing amongst their peers?</li><li>• Check for information about the author's education, training and experience in the field.</li><li>• Look for biographical information such as the author's title (Dr., Prof. etc.) and career history.</li></ul> |
| Accuracy:       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there a date on the information?</li><li>• Is the information current, or are the ideas now outdated?</li><li>• Is the information detailed, exact and comprehensive?</li></ul>                                                                                                         |
| Reasonableness: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the article present a balanced argument?</li><li>• Is the tone of the writing reasoned?</li><li>• How objective is the author?</li><li>• Is the information consistent?</li><li>• Are there conflicts of interest?</li></ul>                                                          |
| Support:        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where did the information come from?</li><li>• Are the sources for the information listed?</li><li>• Is there a bibliography?</li><li>• What support does the author give for the information provided?</li><li>• Is contact information provided for the author?</li></ul>                |

## HELP AND ADVICE

For help and advice on any aspect of evaluating information, please see the Skills for Learning website at <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>.



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