Evaluating Information Resources: A Checklist

When it comes to research, there's quality information out there, there's junk, and there's everything in between. How do you tell what's reliable and what's not? There is a lot more to picking a good source for your paper/presentation/project than just finding something that fits your topic. You need someone who knows what they're talking about. This brief checklist can help you identify if the source is reliable. None of these alone can determine the quality, but the more boxes you can check 'yes', the more likely it is that you are looking at a quality source.

Authority

- ❑ Does the information reference the authors' name, current position, academic degree, and/or biography?
- ❑ Is the authors' 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 'refereed')
- ❑ Does the information come from an academic journal or from a source with the word 'journal' in the title?
- ❑ Was the information located by a reference from a selective index/database, rather than a 'catch-all' or 'comprehensive' index/database?
- ❑ Does the source list the publisher of the information? Is this publisher reputable?

Content

- ❑ Is the information current? Does the source have a publication, authorship, 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 jargon or language of the field of study?
- ❑ How long is the document? Is it kept shorter only to preserve 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 this 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?

For Further Review:

- "Evaluation of Internet Research Sources" - *http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm*
- "Information Quality: Is the truth out there?" - *http://ils.unc.edu/~fents/310/#Evaluating*
- "Evaluation of Internet Information" - *http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/~techman/eval.html*
- "Bibliography on Evaluating Internet Resources" - *http://www.lib.vt.edu/research/libinst/evalbiblio.html*

(These sites are mainly for Internet evaluation, but have good principles for evaluating information in all formats)

Wayland students & staff are encouraged to contact WBU's Distance Librarian for assistance in searching for information or for any other library-related issues via email (LRCREF@wbu.edu) or phone (800-459-8648 or 806-291-3701).