

How to evaluate your sources

It is useful to evaluate any book, article or online resource used in your researches under a few headings in order to use it to the best advantage in your research. The following are some suggested questions you might keep in mind when looking at a text.

For whom was it produced?

The work could be something very technical, intended only for advanced students or specialists, or it could be a standard text, or it could be a beginners' introduction.

When and by whom was it produced?

The date of a text can be crucial, especially if there is a lot written on the subject. Also, there can be a major difference in quality between something produced by a reputable body and something produced cheaply.

Is it authoritative?

Is the author an expert in his/her field? If a journal article, is the journal refereed?

Is it biased?

Is there a slant towards one side of an argument, and is so, is this made explicit? The work may be produced by a body likely to prefer a particular view of an issue.

Is it relevant?

The work may at first seem to be on the right subject, but it may go off at a tangent or it may explore issues other than the ones you wish to focus on. If so, do not waste time on it.

Is it well written?

Is the text clear and easy to understand? Does it have a logical structure?

Are there references?

It is particularly useful if your source has a good bibliography or good onward links.