

Evaluate information resources with the **STAR system**

Scholarship, Timeliness, Authority, Relevance

Scholarship: Evidence of careful investigation of fact and analysis of opinion. *Questions to ask:* Is the information accurate when checked against other sources? Is the writing style popular, technical, or academic in tone and language? Is this new information or a summarization of older information? How reliable and error-free is the information? Is there evidence of potential bias? Does the author have a specific agenda or point-of-view? Does the author explain where the information was obtained? Does the information include a bibliography or list of sources used?

Timeliness: Currency of the publication and of its bibliography. *Questions to ask:* Is the publication date clearly stated? When was the book last published or the web page last revised? Is it maintained and updated regularly? Are any links on the web page up-to-date and useable? Is the information current or historical enough for your topic? How do the publication dates in the bibliography or list of sources compare to the publication date of the information resource?

Authority: Expertise, knowledge and experience. *Questions to ask:* Is it clear who is authoring, sponsoring or publishing the information? Is the sponsor or publisher legitimate? Is it clear who wrote the information? Are the qualifications (educational degrees, job experience, eyewitness status) of the author clearly stated? How does the author know about this topic? Is the author affiliated with an institution or organization? Is that institution connected to the topic? Is there contact information available for the author of the document?

Relevance: Direct focus on the topic or research question. *Questions to ask:* Does the information cover the subject adequately? Are there inexplicable omissions? What is the purpose of the information, i.e., to inform, convince, or sell? What does it contribute to the literature in the field? Who is the intended audience based on content, tone, and style? What is the overall value of the content compared to the range of resources on the topic?

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How to tell the difference between scholarly work and propaganda

Indicators of Scholarship

Describes limits of research or data
Presents accurate description of alternate viewpoints
Encourages debate, discussion, and criticism
Settles disputes by use of generally accepted
 criteria for evaluating data
Looks for counter-examples
Updates information
Admits own ignorance
Relies on critical thinking skills

Indicators of Propaganda

Excessive claims of certainty, i.e., one "right" way of thinking
Relies on personal attacks and ridicule
Emotional appeals and use of inflammatory language

Suppresses contradictory views
Appeals to popular prejudices
Devalues critical appraisal
Transforms words and statistics to suit purpose
Presents information and views out of context