



Evaluating Sources



WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

When was the book / article written? When was it published? Is this a first edition or printing, a reprint, a revised edition?

If a book: who is the publisher and what is the publisher's reputation, publication field, specialty, political or philosophical orientation?

If an article: what is the periodical and what is its reputation, intended audience, specialty, political or philosophical orientation?

Are there appendixes, indexes, charts, maps, bibliographies, footnotes, glossaries, photos, documents, tests, or questionnaires? Should there be?

Does the book / article contain factual errors (names, dates, places, events), misspelled words, typographical errors, or grammatical errors.

Was the book/article reviewed? Where? By Whom? What did the review say about it?

Who is the author? What is the author's occupation, education, experience, political or philosophical orientation, reputation?

What is the author's purpose in writing the book / article? Is it stated or implied?

Does the author have a bias? Is it easily discernable, or is it a hidden bias?

What are the author's conclusions? Does the author support those conclusions?

How did the author collect the information? Did the author use interviews, library research, questionnaires, laboratory experiments, case studies, and / or standardized tests? Is the book or article based on the author's personal opinion and / or personal experience?

What is the author's approach? Does the author use analysis, cause and effect, classification, comparison and contrast, definition, description, process (how-to), argumentation? Is it subjective or objective?

What is the intended audience? Is the author addressing the general public, scholars, teachers, professionals, fellow practitioners, grade school children, graduate students? Does the author succeed in reaching the intended audience?

Is the book or article written from a contemporary perspective, or is it retrospective?

How does this book / article compare with similar works? Does it agree or disagree with current opinion, government policy, established scholarship, professional practice? Is it based on theory or on proven fact?

IS IT A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?

The difference between “popular” and “scholarly” is in the intended audience, the purpose, and the presentation of the material, not in the quality of the writing or the reliability of the information.

It is POPULAR literature if:

- It is written for the average reader
- The purpose is to inform or entertain
- The language and presentation are informal

It is SCHOLARLY / SCIENTIFIC literature if:

- It is written by researcher for fellow researchers
- The purpose is to present the result of research (the discussion of the problem to be investigated, the methodology, the conclusions, the references and footnotes) in such a way that the reader could replicate the research process
- The language and presentation are formal

IS IT A PRIMARY SOURCE?

It is a PRIMARY source if it comes to you first-hand

- It is the original words or works, whether fiction or nonfiction: novels, stories, poems, letters, autobiographies, diaries, speeches, documents written by historical figures, case studies, reports of original research and experiments, films, paintings, music, sculpture, business correspondence, questionnaires, test, surveys, interviews, experiments, statistics.

It is a SECONDARY source if it comes to you second-hand

- It is commentary, discussion, evaluation, or analysis of a primary source: biographies, critical works about authors, magazine and newspaper accounts, review of original research or artistic works.

Tarleton Library – Central Texas