Ara Institute of Canterbury
Ara rau, taumata rau

Evaluating Information

Information comes from a wide variety of sources and formats, including journals, books, websites, blogs, wikis, and social networking sites. How can you decide if information is appropriate for use in your assignment?

Check your assignment marking guide as it may indicate the type of information required. Another good place to look is on the Moodle site related to your course (note, not all courses have their own Moodle site). The Subject Guide for your programme of study can be found at the top of the Ara Library home page. Your course tutor can also guide you on the types of acceptable sources you can use.

Ask the following questions to decide if information is suitable for your needs:

- **Who is the material written for?** Is it for students, professional experts, or the general public?

- **Who is the material written by?** What information can you find about the author(s)? What are their qualifications? Are they well known in their area of expertise? Is the author an academic scholar or are they a journalist/other author or commentator writing for the public? Do they have any potential biases? If there is no author, you should be concerned about the quality of the material.

- **What language is used?** Is it in the language of a particular discipline, with specialised, technical words? If it is very difficult to read and understand, it may not be useful. If the material is written for a more general (popular) audience, it may not be sufficiently detailed to be useful.

- **How relevant** is the material to key concepts in your search strategy or assignment topic? (See the handout Instructional Words). Does the title of the text indicate its topic, and does it cover the area you are interested in?

- **When was the material published?** Is it the most recent information/research on the topic and is this an important consideration in your research? Whilst you may need material that is up to date (e.g. published within the last five years), do you also need historical information?

- **Is there a review process?** E.g. for a journal article is it peer reviewed/refereed/edited?

- **Is the content objective?** Are there bias to the information? Is there an editorial agenda/ viewpoint/sponsor's bias? Alternatively, is there evidence of research that is supported by evidence? Where did the author obtain their information? Is there a reference list, and are the references recent?

- **What geographic coverage** does it have? For example, if you need New Zealand information does it include this?

- **If using websites, ask the above questions and:**
    - Look at the 'about' or 'who are we' section of the site.
    - Look for the last updated date.
    - Find evidence of sponsorship (which may contribute to a degree of bias).
    - Use Google Advanced Search to 'find pages that link to the page.'
    - Determine who the author is, and whether they are contactable.

Go to https://subjectguides.ara.ac.nz/informationskills/evaluate for video clips and more tips on how to select authoritative, accurate, credible and reliable information.

Important note:

Having found your material, note down all the details carefully, so that you can reference it appropriately in your assignment - see A Quick Guide to APA Referencing: Part 1: General Guidelines and A Quick Guide to APA Referencing: Part 2: Reference Examples