Evaluating your search results

Evaluate your search results critically.

Is the material RELEVANT?

Above all else ...

Is it of use to YOU — given your intended treatment of the topic?

This is where you must apply your expertise.

What is the QUALITY of the material?

Can you trust the content and methodology? Are the conclusions valid?

For example

- Self-published Internet material is often suspect, but may be useful (after critical evaluation)
- A Thesis or Dissertation has been marked and accepted: therefore the work, in general, possesses some academic merit.
- Articles from academic journals are usually peer-reviewed; but that does not mean that each article’s content is accepted as fact. Perhaps the editors wish to encourage further debate?
- Review articles are highly recommended, if they are on topic.
CRITERIA for Evaluation

Authority
- Who is the author?
- What are their qualifications, affiliations, or reputation?
- Is it edited or refereed (peer-reviewed)? If so, what is the status of the editor or publisher?
- Is the author or publishing body ideologically biased?

Audience & Purpose
- To whom is the material directed?
- What is the author's intention: To explain? To discuss? To persuade? To provoke? To publicise?
- Has that Audience & Purpose changed the item's vocabulary or treatment? — Or relevance?
- The Audience & Purpose may relate to the item's format: article, thesis/dissertation, editorial, etc.

Omissions or Errors
- Because of its audience or purpose, has the item over-simplified points specifically of interest to your research?
- What (else) has the author omitted? — Deliberately? Accidentally? In ignorance?
- Are there inaccuracies?
- Has the author misrepresented their sources?

Date or Currency
- For older material, do the technical terms still mean what they did at the time?
- For an important concept in an old item, does the current literature now use a different term?
- Is the material sufficiently recent? Have the facts or theory since changed?
- Are the material's references too dated?
- Recent items in thesis bibliographies have been shown to be more heavily used per item than the older items.

Citations & References
Facts or information not self-evident or "commonly accepted" ought to cite a reference or source.
- If the item needed such references: were they given?
- Are the references appropriate?
- Are the references listed and cited correctly? If not, perhaps the author didn't actually read them?
- Perhaps run a citation search. What later works cited this item? favourably?

Give yourself enough time to actually READ and USE your search results.

See also

PAGE 1 (Topic, Context, & Your Treatment) PAGE 2 (The search itself)