

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)