EVALUATION OF INFORMATION

- Fact vs. Opinion
- Currency
- Authority
- Intended audience
- Publishing body
- Primary or Secondary sources of information
- Internet critical evaluation
- CARS checklist
TYPES OF INFORMATION SOURCES

Evaluating the Information (1)

Fact vs. Opinion
When you evaluate information it is very important to distinguish between fact and opinion.

- **Fact**
  - A fact is something concrete that can be proven. You can find facts in legal records, scientific findings, encyclopaedias, atlases, etc. In other words, facts are the truth and are accepted as such.

- **Example:**
  - It is a fact that:
    - University of Fort Hare is situated in the Eastern Cape.
    - Abortion is legal in South Africa
Opinion
- An opinion is less concrete. It's a view formed in the mind of a person about a particular issue.
- In other words, it is what someone believes or thinks, and is not necessarily the truth.
- Also, note in the examples below how facts are the same for everybody, but opinions can differ quite widely.

Example:
- In my opinion:
  - University of Fort Hare has the most beautiful gardens of all the universities in the Eastern
  - I do not agree with abortion or I do agree with abortion.
Currency (up-to-date)

- Currency defines the age of the information.
- You will have to decide how important it is for you to have current information.
- Your topic will help you determine the currency of information you need.
- If your assignment is about history, then you will probably be looking for older material and currency will not be that important to you.
Currency (up-to-date)

- Current (up to date) information can be found in the latest newspapers, journals, television programmes, books, acts/law reports, etc.
- To know if the information is current, look at the following:
  - When the information was published or written.
  - Is information in this field constantly being updated and are there new ideas being written? In certain subject fields like e.g. IT (Information Technology), you will find that information is quickly out-dated and needs constant updating.
Authority (1)

It is important to know where the information is coming from and by whom it was written. Look at the following:

- Who is the author of the information?
- What are the credentials of the author, e.g. qualifications?
- What else did the author publish, especially in the same field?
- Is the author in any way biased?
- Is the information written by a person who is a specialist in this field or is it merely someone’s hobby or opinion?
- Is the content verified, reviewed or peer-reviewed in any way?
Authority (2)

It is important to know where the information is coming from and by whom it was written. Look at the following:

- If the information is published by an organisation, is that organisation recognised and a reliable source/authority? E.g. the South African National Tuberculosis Association for information on TB-related topics.
- Make use of the following resources to answer the above questions:
  - Internet. You can do a search for the name of the author to help you determine what else the author has published and might even provide the credentials of the author, etc.
  - Publication (book or article). You might find the author’s credentials and qualifications in his publications.
  - Read the preface!
Intended Audience (1)

- When people write articles, papers, etc. they are always aimed at a specific audience,
- For example:
  - a child care article that is aimed at parents,
  - a highly scientific article is aimed at other scientists on that level.
Intended Audience (2)

Therefore the following is important:

- Who is the intended audience for the source (books, journals, etc.)? Look at the preface.
- Is the publication aimed at a highly specialised, technical audience or is it more basic and elementary?
- The bottom line is to make sure that the information is appropriate for your needs.
- Again, the preface will often answer these questions.
- Modern retrieval and search systems also sometimes indicate the targeted audience.
Publishing Body

- Who is the publisher of the source? (books, journals, web pages, etc.)

- What other publications have been published by this body?

- What is the reputation of the publisher, producer or distributor?

- Is it a university, an alternative press or a private/political organization?
Primary vs. Secondary Sources (1)

Primary source

- A primary source gives you original research that is presented for the first time, in other words new findings and theories.

- See the following examples:
  - An article in a newspaper written by a journalist or freelance writer who was present at that specific event and is now writing about and describing what has happened.
  - Journals that publish latest or new findings.
Primary vs. Secondary Sources (2)

Secondary source

- A secondary source does not present new information or research, but provides information or evaluations of previously presented research.
- See the following examples:
  - Books and articles that explain or review research works.
  - Histories and critical commentaries.
  - Newspaper articles written by a reporter who had nothing to do with the actual research.
  - Textbooks.
Internet (1)

- There is a plethora of information to use on the internet for assignment purposes.
- However there is also an overabundance of rubbish/garbage on the internet.
- Analyse web resources before you use it for your assignment.
- The following guidelines will help you:

  - Accuracy:
    - How accurate is the information contained in the document?
Internet (2)

- **Authentication/Authority:**
  - Who wrote the article or designed the web-page? Can you contact the author of the article that you plan to use for your assignment?

- Is this person attached to a reputable institution?

- **Objectivity:**
  - Does the author acknowledge other viewpoints?
Internet (3)

- Currency:
  - When did the author write the article?

- Coverage:
  - How thoroughly did the author cover a certain topic? Did he focus only on one aspect or more?

- Plagiarism:
  - Do not use another author’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person.

- Citing:
  - Did the author of the article acknowledge other works?
CARS Checklist

- **Credibility**: trustworthy source, author’s credentials, evidence of quality control, known or respected authority, organisational support.
  - Goal: an authoritative source, a source that supplies some good evidence that allows you to trust it.

- **Accuracy**: up to date, factual, detailed, exact, comprehensive, audience and purpose reflect intentions of completeness and accuracy.
  - Goal: a source that is correct today (not yesterday), a source that gives the whole truth.
CARS Checklist

- **Reasonableness**: fair, balanced, objective, reasoned, no conflict of interest, absence of fallacies or slanted tone.
  - Goal: a source that engages the subject thoughtfully and reasonably, concerned with the truth.

- **Support**: listed sources, contact information, available corroboration, claims supported, documentation supplied.
  - Goal: a source that provides convincing evidence for the claims made, a source you can triangulate (find at least two other sources that support it).