Evaluating Information Sources
Being able to critically evaluate the information you encounter is a hugely valuable skill. Why? Because not everything you read is true. And sometimes information can be technically true, but still be so biased, selective, or leading as to make the information essentially useless for research purposes.

These are the five criteria to be aware of whenever you evaluate your information sources. We’ll look at each in detail.

- Currency
- Relevance
- Authority
- Accuracy
- Purpose
Some research projects require very up-to-date information in order to be accurate. When we talk about currency, we’re talking about how current the information is in a book or article. Ask yourself:

- When was the book, article, or website published or produced?
- Is the information outdated? (It may have been current at one time, but is it still?) For some subjects, like history, this may be less important. For others, like technology, currency is critical.
Relevance

What is the importance of the information for your needs? The information source may meet all other criteria for good information, but will the information help you answer your research questions? Ask yourself:

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- Is the information at an appropriate level for your needs?
- Does the resource add new information or does it simply compile information easily found elsewhere?
- Does it extensively or minimally cover the topic?
Who is accepting responsibility for the quality of the information in a given resource? Once we know who’s responsible for an information source, we can ask: Are they an authority on the topic? Also, ask yourself:

- What are the author or organization’s credentials?
- Are any credentials given?
- Is the author qualified to write this document?
- Is the book, article, website, etc. written in their area of expertise?
- Is the author affiliated with an educational institution?
Accuracy

If you’re not already an expert on a particular topic, it can be difficult to determine whether or not the information in a book or article, or on a web page, is accurate. Ask yourself:

• Is the information in the article cited? An article with references or citations is far more likely to be accurate because the information can be verified by going to the original sources. If statistics are given, do the authors say where the statistics come from?

• Are there typographical errors? Spelling or grammar errors? If so, you’ll want to be very careful about using that article as a resource. Bad or non-existent editing usually means that the information in the article hasn’t been closely reviewed.
Purpose

What is the reason why the information exists? What are the biases of the authors or the organization behind the information? In order to write a well-rounded paper, you’ll likely want to collect information from both sides of the issue. When all your information comes from just one side of a debate, your paper will lack balance and perspective. Ask yourself:

• What is the purpose of the information? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade?
• Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
• Is the author objective and un-biased? Bias isn’t always bad, but you’ll always want to be aware of what the author’s bias is.
### A quick word about Website Domains

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<th><strong>.edu Websites</strong></th>
<th><strong>.gov Websites</strong></th>
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<td>Carteret Community College has a <strong>.edu</strong> domain, as do most colleges and universities. Only colleges and universities are eligible for <strong>.edu</strong> domains.</td>
<td>The federal government collects and compiles a massive amount of information every year, and is required by law to make most of it available to the public. All government information appears on <strong>.gov</strong> websites.</td>
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<th><strong>.org Websites</strong></th>
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<td><strong>.org</strong> domain websites host non-profit organizations. The website maintainers have no profit-based reason for providing the information they do, but it’s worth noting that nearly anybody can start a non-profit organization.</td>
<td>Finally, <strong>.com</strong> domain websites are for commercial use. The vast majority of websites you encounter will be <strong>.coms</strong>. Absolutely anybody can start up a <strong>.com</strong> site, so the information found on them runs from extremely reliable to utter lies and fabrications.</td>
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If you ever have questions or need assistance, ask a librarian!