Evaluating sources of information

How do you know what sources are relevant and have accurate information? Use these guidelines when deciding which sources to use.

RADAR Framework

*Relevance***:** how relevant is the information source for your assignment?

- Consider if the source helps you clarify your topic or if it helps you answer your research question.
- Compare to other sources: can you identify similarities, differences, additional information, or gaps?
- Primary x secondary source: Is the source original (the first account of information, an original study) or secondary (a source that describes what was written by someone else)? Whenever possible, try to trace information to the original source.

*Authority***:** who is the author of the information?

- Give preference for sources published by an author or organization with appropriate credentials or qualifications to write about the topic.
- Try to identify the author's affiliation. That can tell you about the author's level of expertise, or if there is a potential bias (e.g. there may be a conflict of interest if a research about the effects of vaping on the body is conducted by authors tied to the cigarette industry).

*Date***:** when was the information published or updated?

- Consider your topic: generally, sources there were published or updated recently (within the last 5 years) are recommended. However, older sources may be needed for historical or contextual purposes.

*Appearance/accuracy***:** what does the source look like, and how is information described in it?

- Different sources have different elements, target audience, and terminology. For example, news, magazine articles, and many non-specialist websites may use language that is easier to understand, but also

more ambiguous; web sources may include images or links not related to the main story (think of ads and clickbait stories); blogs and editorials tend to be more subjective than academic articles that report original research.

- Pay attention to the presence of citations and references. The use of citations can contribute to make information clearer and more credible, but it is important to also verify who the author is citing and how accurately information from other sources is described by the author.

Reason: Why was the information published?

- Try to identify the intentions of the author when publishing the information: was it to teach, inform, influence, sell something, entertain, or another reason?
- Are there any clear biases? Sources that rely more heavily on opinions (editorials, opinion articles, blog posts, social media posts) or are less objective and might not address facts properly.

Content of this guide adapted from

Mandalios, J. (2013). RADAR: An approach for helping students evaluate Internet sources. *Journal of Information Science*, *39*(4), 470-478. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0165551513478889

Reg Erhardt Library. (2018, Mar 28). RADAR for Evaluating Information: RADAR. SAIT. Retrieved June 16, 2020, from https://libguides.sait.ca/RADAR