EVALUATING INFORMATION

ICGP LIBRARY & INFORMATION SERVICE

All information, whether it is print or online, needs to be evaluated to ensure that it is good quality and authentic.

WHY IS EVALUATING INFORMATION IMPORTANT?

Once you have found information that matches the topic and requirements of your research, you should evaluate these information sources. Evaluating information encourages you to think critically about the reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, point of view or bias of information sources.

The rapid development of the Internet means that both a wealth of health information and a minefield of misinformation are now readily available to patients. The internet has become integral to the ways doctors practice medicine. In fact, a research study by Google (2012) shows that when making clinical decisions, physicians spend twice as much time using online resources than they do print. Also more and more patients are now searching for health information online. Like a lot of information on the Internet, not all medical content is credible.

USEFUL ONLINE EVALUATION TOOLS

• **Informed Health Choices:** Learn to think critically about health choices.
https://www.informedhealthchoices.org/

• **iHealthFacts:** Quickly and easily check the reliability of a health claim.
https://ihealthfacts.ie/

• **Be Media Smart:** STOP, THINK, CHECK
https://www.bemediasmart.ie/

• **DISCERN:** A brief questionnaire which provides users with a valid and reliable way of assessing the quality of written information on treatment choices for a health problem.
http://www.discern.org.uk/

QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION—PRINT RESOURCES

These questions will help you evaluate secondary printed sources—books, journal articles, magazines, etc.—based on three criteria: objectivity of the author, credibility of the work, and applicability to your personal needs.

1. **Author's Credentials -** Who is the author? What are the author qualifications/expertise regarding the subject matter? Is the author associated with any institution/ organisation that might lead to an inherent bias?

2. **Title -** Does the title indicate the content of the book or article? For example, with regard to a book is there a subtitle available with more information? Is the work applicable to your study?

3. **Date of publication** - Does the information need to be current and if so, is it up-to-date?

4. **Publisher** - Do you recognise the publisher? Some publishers have excellent reputations and are well-known in certain disciplines. In general, if the publisher is a university press, such as Oxford University Press, the source is scholarly.

5. **Edition** - If a book has multiple editions then this indicates a high level of regard for it to have been revised and updated.

6. **Content** - Is the information supplied credible, accurate and verifiable? Are conclusions based on research or actual figures that can be checked in other sources?

7. **Journal Ranking** - In the case of a journal article, is it appearing in a reputable journal with a high citation ranking score?

8. **Review Articles** - Is the review article considered an important contribution to its subject area? Peer review is the evaluation of work by one or more people with similar competencies as the producers of the work (peers). Peer review methods are used to maintain quality standards, improve performance, and provide credibility. In academia, scholarly peer review is often used to determine an academic paper's suitability for publication.

9. **Objectivity/Bias** - When reading material, ask yourself if the assumptions the author makes are reasonable and grounded in fact and research, not emotion. Can you determine if the author has researched extensively in this field? Or are his or her sources difficult to verify?

10. **Authority** - Answers to all the questions posed above will help you determine whether you can accept a source as an authority. Can you trust it?

QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION—ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

There is a good deal of high-quality information on the web, but there is also much that is of questionable quality. Each web page will have to be examined critically. The following questions will help you.

1. **Content provider -** Is it a government site, a professional organisation, a commercial organisation, a personal site, etc?

2. **Quality** - Is the site run by a professional body? Does it have an editorial board?

3. **Ease of use** - Is it easy to navigate?

4. **Useful Resources** - Are there any useful graphics, tutorials, guides available?

5. **Audience** - Who is the site developed for i.e. public or clinicians?

6. **Coverage** - How many years content does it contain and is it up-to-date? Look for dates on the site detailing when the information was uploaded.

7. **External Links** - Does it provide useful links to other reliable online resources? Are the links actually working?

8. **Bias** - What is the site's purpose? Who is providing the funding/advertising?

9. **User support** - Are contact details for the content providers listed? Is there user support?

10. **Privacy** - Do you have to register and do you have to give personal details? Does the site have a privacy policy?

11. **Recommendation** - Would you recommend the website to others?

ONLINE TOOLS

· **CRAP:** Determining whether a website is credible or not by reviewing its Currency, Reliability, Authority and Purpose (CRAP).
https://library.csuchico.edu/sites/default/files/craap-test.pdf

· **SPAT:** Evaluating the reliability of a website's content by reviewing the Site, Publisher, Audience, Timeliness (SPAT).
http://www.spat.pitt.edu/