














I. EVALUATING INFORMATION

Your paper is only as credible as the resources you use for building your ideas, points and conclusions. Select your sources carefully! Here are some criteria to consider:

	<p>DOCUMENTATION Ask: "Do the authors cite sources for facts and assertions?"</p>	<p>In Academia, authors <i>must</i> let the reader know where they got their information, by providing references to the sources. (And so must you!) If sources are not cited, don't waste your time -- look elsewhere!</p>								
	<p>AUTHOR / EDITOR Ask: "What qualifies this person to address this topic?"</p>	<p>Look for credentials (academic degrees, professional experience, etc.) and/or affiliations with organizations that might indicate either expertise or bias.</p>								
	<p>PUBLISHER / SPONSOR Ask: "Who supports this work, and why?"</p>	<p>The publisher may be a clue to credibility or bias. Is it a:</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>professional society</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>non-profit organization</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>university press</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>commercial publisher</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>government agency</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>corporation</i></td> </tr> </table>	<i>professional society</i>	<i>non-profit organization</i>	<i>university press</i>	<i>commercial publisher</i>	<i>government agency</i>	<i>corporation</i>		
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	<p>STYLE Ask: "What is the purpose of this information?" "Who is the intended audience?" "Does it make sense?"</p>	<p>Notice the presentation -- graphics, use of language, clarity of argument. Is the work <i>scholarly</i> (written for other researchers), or <i>popular</i> (written for the general public)? Is it suited to your particular assignment?</p> <p>Assess the author's purpose. Is it primarily to:</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>inform</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>persuade</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>amuse</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>satirize</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>sell</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>rant</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>show off</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>annoy</i></td> </tr> </table> <p>... or something else?</p>	<i>inform</i>	<i>persuade</i>	<i>amuse</i>	<i>satirize</i>	<i>sell</i>	<i>rant</i>	<i>show off</i>	<i>annoy</i>
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	<p>PUBLICATION DATE Ask: "Is this information still relevant?"</p>	<p>In some fields, information may become hopelessly outdated within a few years. In others, points and insights made decades ago may still be valid and relevant.</p> <p>Note: When using books that are collections of articles, look for the date the article was originally published -- it may be several years before the date of the book.</p>								

II. The Information Cycle: How Academic Information Happens

	Activity	Information Produced
	<p>Step 1: The Work Researchers at universities, government agencies, institutes, etc. do their work in the field, lab, archives... or their own brains. They gather their data and results, and try to determine its meaning.</p>	<p>Informal only: word-of-mouth, e-mail discussion, interviews, etc.</p>
	<p>Step 1a (optional): the Professional Conference Researchers often present their work-in-progress to colleagues at a professional conference to gain feedback about their methods and results before publication.</p>	<p>Conference Proceedings: Abstracts (sometimes full text or presentation) published in print or on the sponsoring organization's website.</p>
	<p>Step 2: Informing Colleagues Researchers report their results to colleagues by submitting a formal paper to a professional journal. The paper usually includes the following: abstract (summary), introduction, methods, results, conclusion / discussion, works cited. The editor may send it to other experts in the field for peer review before accepting it.</p>	<p>Research Journal Articles Find with: article indexes (e.g., EBSCO's <i>Academic Search Premier</i>). Note the formal style, author credentials, and extensive sources cited.</p>
	<p>Step 3: Informing the Public: Staff reporters and freelance writers glean interesting or newsworthy items from journals, conferences, etc. and report it in trade journals, magazines, newspapers and broadcasts. They write for a non-expert audience and present information in a clear, engaging style.</p>	<p>"Popular" Articles: Find with: article indexes; media website archives</p>
	<p>Step 4: Pulling Information Together After enough information has been generated on a topic, someone will write an in-depth book about it. A book may be scholarly or popular, and may be informative or argue a case. A publisher will accept the book if it meets criteria such as quality, profitability, match to their mission, etc. Writing, editing, publishing and marketing a book takes time, so information is usually a year or two old by the time the book becomes available.</p>	<p>Books Find in: Library Catalogs (e.g., <i>CougarCat</i>, <i>Summit</i>)</p> <p>Book reviews appear in newspapers, magazines, and journals – find them in article indexes (or on Amazon, etc.)</p>
	<p>Step 5: Standing the Test of Time If the information or idea holds up under further research, it will become generally accepted in the field. No longer cutting-edge, it is now part of the background material we can use to understand and explore a topic.</p>	<p>Reference Works: Encyclopedias, textbooks, dictionaries, handbooks, etc.</p>

When writing a term paper, try working with information in the *reverse* order of its production:

- Start with **reference works** for background on your topic and directions to explore.
- Look for **books** that cover your topic in **depth** and present extended arguments.
- For explanations of **recent developments**, try articles in **magazines** and **newspapers** (written for **laypeople**) and in **trade journals** (written for professionals in the field).
- Go to **professional journal articles** for the latest work and to read **original research**.