

Evaluating Information

A Research & Library Skills Exercise ♦ 2011-2012
www.lib.umd.edu/UES/engl101/exercises.html



Instructor's Name: _____ ENGL 101 Section: _____ Class Meeting Time: _____

Your Name: _____ Date: _____

Why evaluate information?

Whether you are researching health information or looking into buying a car, you want to make certain that the information you are relying on is credible. The same goes for information you plan on using in a research paper. In order to insure that the information you are using is accurate, you need to evaluate it by looking critically at different elements; these elements include *timeliness*, *intended audience*, and *authorship*, among other factors. No matter where you find the information (e.g., books, articles, websites, etc.) it is important to critically evaluate all of it.

The Exercise:

Answer the following questions in order to practice evaluating information:

Evaluating Information – Exigency

How does the exigency (particularly currency and timeliness) effect how you select research sources? Keep this in mind as you answer these two questions:

Imagine you were writing a paper on a medical topic. Would you use information from an article about **lung transplants** published in 1999 or 2009? Or, does it matter? Why or why not?

Imagine you were writing a paper about **Egyptian pyramids**. Would you use information from a book published in 1943 or 2003? Or, does it matter? Why or why not?

Evaluating Information – Intended Audience

How would your writing style vary in the following examples:

- a) invite friends by email to a free concert on campus, as compared to
- b) writing a research paper that will be read by your ENGL 101 peers?

Mention the **context**, **genre**, and **purpose** for each of the two styles of writing:

Imagine you are assigned to read an article from each of the following types of periodicals. What kinds of hypothesis can you make about the audience for these publications and their opinion on **lowering the drinking age**?

Scholarly journal titled: ***Addiction***

Popular magazine titled: ***Student Affairs Leader***

Evaluating Information – Authorship

Just because you find a book in the University of Maryland Libraries does not mean the content is guaranteed to be credible, uncontroversial or unbiased. You need to decide whether a source meets some basic requirements: *Is the book written by someone who has knowledge of this subject? Has it satisfied your requirements concerning scholarship and depth?* Keep this in mind as you answer these questions:

To begin, go to the Libraries' Catalog: www.catalog.umd.edu.

Find the name of the author for the book titled: *Arming America: The origins of a national gun culture*

Author's name is: _____

How many copies do the Libraries own? _____ copies.

What other books has the author written that are owned by UM Libraries? Do an **author beginning with...** search in the Catalog to find out. List the other book titles here:

You might need to search **Google**, or use a database in **Research Port** that contains general news articles such as **Academic Search Premier** or **LexisNexis Academic** to find information that will help you answer these questions:

Briefly, describe the controversy surrounding this book.

Basing your conclusion on the information you discovered above, is this book a credible source for an academic research paper? Why or why not?

For more information on evaluating books and periodicals, go to:
www.lib.umd.edu/guides/evaluate_sources.html