

RADAR Evaluating Information Sources for Novice Researchers

RADAR is a framework that can help you remember what kinds of questions you should be asking about an information source as you evaluate it for quality and usefulness in your research.

Rationale	Rationale is important because books, articles, and web pages are made to serve a purpose. Remember that no information is completely free from bias because the positionality of the authors always impacts their perceptions. The rationale may include intent to educate, entertain, or sell a product or point of view. Some sources may be frivolous or commercial in nature, providing inaccurate or false information. Other sources are more ambiguous about any potential partiality. Varied points of view can be valid as long as they are based on good reasoning and careful use of evidence.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did the author or publisher make this information available? 2. Is there obvious and/or extreme bias or prejudice? 3. Are alternative points of view presented? 4. Does the author omit any important facts or data that might disprove their claim? 5. If there is emotion, what is the purpose? 6. What tone is being used?
Authority	Authority is important in judging the credibility of the author's assertions. In a trial regarding DNA evidence, a jury would find a genetics specialist's testimony far more authoritative compared to a testimony from a professor in English.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the author's credentials? 2. How is the author related to your topic? 3. Is the author affiliated with an educational institution or a reputable organization? 4. Can you find information about the author in reference books or on the Internet? 5. Do other books or articles on the same research topic cite the author? 6. Is the publisher of the information source reputable?
Date	Date, or currency, is important to note because information can quickly become obsolete. Supporting your research with facts that have been superseded by new research or recent events weakens your argument. Not all assignments require the most current information; older materials can provide valuable information such as a historical overview of your topic. In some disciplines, the date of the source is less important, while in others it is more so.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When was the information published or last updated? 2. Have newer articles been published on your topic? 3. Are links or references to other sources up-to-date? 4. Is your topic in an area that changes rapidly, like technology or science? 5. Is the information obsolete?
Accuracy	Accuracy is important because errors and untruths distort a line of reasoning. When you present inaccurate information, you undermine your own credibility.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there statements you know to be false? 2. Was the information reviewed by editors or subject experts before it was published? 3. Do the citations and references support the author's claim? Are the references correctly cited? 4. What do other people have to say on the topic? Is there general agreement among subject experts? 5. If applicable, is there a description of the research method used? Does the method seem appropriate and well-executed? 6. Was item published by a peer-reviewed journal, academic press, or other reliable publisher?
Relevance	Relevance is important because you are expected to support your ideas with pertinent information. A source detailing Einstein's marriage would not be very relevant to a paper about his scientific theories.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the information answer your research question? 2. Does the information meet the stated requirements for the assignment? 3. Is the information too technical or too simplified for you to use? Who is the intended audience? 4. Does the source add something new to your knowledge of the topic? 5. Is the information focused on the geographical location you are interested in?