

Library 100, Spring 2013

Evaluate a book or ebook source

Before you even pick up a book, you can begin to evaluate your book source while searching the library's database/catalog. Here's how:

1. Is your topic timely? Will materials that are 10 years old still be relevant to your topic? Can older documents be used as background information in your research?

For example:

- If your topic is on something involving the environment, can a 10 year old source be OK?
- If your topic is on the post-traumatic stress of parents of the victims of the shootings at Newtown School in Connecticut, can a 10 year old source be OK?
- If your topic is the remodeling design of the San Francisco Bay Bridge, can a 10 year old source be OK?

2. Is the book or ebook available? Do you need access to the book right away for your research?
3. Is there a summary of the book in the library's catalog? After reading the summary, is this book right for your topic?
4. Do you recognize the author? If so, do you feel the author is an authority on the subject?
5. Are there subjects or keywords in the bibliographic record that you were unaware of?

When you have the book in hand or the ebook on the screen, further evaluate the source:

1. Open the book and look at the title page. Does the title reflect your topic area? Do you know the author? Is the author a reliable source for information on your topic? If there is no author is the organization that wrote or published the book a reliable source?
2. Next, look at the table of content? Do you think there is a chapter that covers your topic?
3. If your topic is not readily identified in the Table of Content, scan through the index? Is there other information in the book that may cover your topic?
4. Look at the preface and scan the content. The preface is the author's explanation of the purpose of the book. After reviewing the preface and the main text, do you think the book is a good resource for your research? Also, look for opinion that may be too strong or propaganda. Check to see that opinion is supported by fact.
5. Finally, look at references and other citations (usually in the back of the book before the index but often citations will be at the end of each chapter). Do they seem reliable and authentic? Would some of these materials be good resources for your research?