

Think Critically!

Critically thinking about your information sources is essential! Books, articles and web sites will present many different viewpoints. You must consider not only the purpose of the information, but also the context of your project.

Use these guidelines to determine if the book, article, or web site you're considering is appropriate for your project.

Point of View or Bias

- Does the article use inflammatory or emotional language?
- Does the article use political language?
- What theories or beliefs can you uncover in this article or book?
- What do people say about this book?
- Can you separate facts from opinion?
- Did you remind yourself that people can have different world views that influence what they write or say, without being technically right or wrong?

TIP! Use a database, such as Academic Search, to look for reviews on the books you're using for your project. Reviews will often reveal the biases present in books.

Coverage

- Does it strive to be comprehensive or does it focus on a narrow aspect of a topic?
- Does the author acknowledge what he/she left out?
- Does it cover a limited region, time period or group of people?

TIP! Look for a variety of articles to fill in all angles of a topic. One or two articles usually is not enough.

Timeliness

- Does your topic demand current or older materials? Or a mix?
- Will the currency of your topic affect my ability to find scholarly information?
- Did you find the most recent research?

TIP! Sometimes the most current material is not available in books, try articles instead. If your topic is extremely current, news magazines and web sites may be your only choice.

Author

- What can I find out about the author of the article or book?
- What else has my author written?
- What organizations is the author affiliated with? Is this important?

TIP! If the author is with an organization, consider what that means. And remember, non-profit does not mean bias-free.

Source

- What can you discover about the journal or magazine that published this article?
- Does the journal represent a certain point of view?
- What can you find out about the author?

For example, if you were writing a paper on a current political topic, why might the information from an article in [The Nation](#) present radically different information than an article in [The National Review](#)? Take a look at their homepages and see what biases you can detect.

TIP! Look on the Web for the homepage of the journal from which your articles come. You can learn a lot about the personality of a source this way.