

Welcome to this Edith Cowan University Library podcast on **evaluating information**.

As modern technology makes finding information much easier, it becomes more and more important to evaluate the information you find.

At university level you cannot just accept things at face value, and must check for yourself that the information you have gathered is of useable quality.

To be useful for you assignments information must have 5 important attributes.

It must be accurate and reliable.

It must be relevant.

It must be current.

It must be free from prejudice and bias

It must be authoritative – which means it must be from credible and identifiable sources.

Let's take a closer look at these five qualities.

**First the information must be accurate and reliable.**

To help you decide if your information is accurate ask yourself these questions...

Is the information based on facts or just opinion?

If it is based on facts, does it cite the sources of these facts?

Can you check these sources yourself?

Are the sources themselves reliable?

The next thing we should look at when deciding if information is useful is **the relevance of the information**.

Most assignments will ask you to address a particular question, and it is important that you answer the question you are asked.

While it is useful to have some background information most of your research time should go into finding information that will help you actually answer the question you are asked.

The next important thing to consider is the **currency of the information**.

In general books, although they may give you very detailed and in depth information, tend to be less up to date than journal articles. Books take time to write and publish and may not be available for a year or so after they have been written.

Journals on the other hand will give you the most up to date information, as they are published regularly, but journal articles tend to be less inclusive and may deal with only small elements of the wider subject you have been asked to discuss.

Your subject matter will help you decide if your information is current.

If you are writing an essay on symbolism in Renaissance Art then a ten year old book may have information that is still relevant.

If on the other hand you are studying technology, a ten year old book will be useful only in the most general historical sense.

**The next thing we need to look at is if the information is free from prejudice and bias.**

Whenever possible you should use more than once source for information. This will make sure that you are aware of any debate within the subject area, and that the information you use gives a balanced view of the subject rather than representing only one side of the story, or only one point of view.

The next criteria for judging useful information is that **it must be authoritative – which means it must be from a credible and identifiable source.**

Who has written and published the information? Do they have a good reputation and credentials? Have you ever heard of them before? Do you have any reason to believe what they are saying is true? If you are not sure of the reputation of the publishing body or the author you should spend a few minutes researching them. Are they a recognised name within the field? Have they published other work? Do other articles in the area cite their work?

Although the five factors we have looked at so far can be used to judge the usefulness of any information there are two information sources that I would like to mention in particular.

Before I end this podcast I'd like to give a little warning about limiting your information search to Google. Google is a valuable search engine and it is tempting to just "Google it" and forget about any other sources of information.

**PLEASE Do not do this!**

**Less than 15%** of the world's information is digitized and even less than that is available for free online.

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