

Evaluating Articles

Considerations for Students

Currency (Age) — How old is the article? Newer articles are often better, but not always. In general, most technological or health-related topics require that information be no older than five years. Even five years may be too old. But sometimes you need to read older articles. Maybe the article is foundational, i.e., important and influential in that field of study. Or maybe the topic is in a field that is not date dependent, like history or literary analysis.

Relevance and Substantiveness — The article should provide information that is directly related to the topic you are researching. Before you decide to use an article, read it thoroughly. The article should provide information that is solid, detailed, and ample enough to improve your understanding of an issue. Check to see that all of the article, not just a small part of it, applies to your topic. Articles less than a page in length are rarely substantial enough to be used as sources for a college-level paper. Possible exceptions include newspaper articles and short articles that contain useful quotes or statistics.

Reliability -- Is the content mostly opinion or is it stating facts? Does the creator provide references for or sources of facts, data, or quotations? Is it a primary or secondary source of information? Is it relying on primary or secondary sources of information? If the article is reporting the results of research, methods or references should be provided. Sometimes it can be helpful to find other sources of information that can confirm what the source is claiming.

Authority — Most articles in magazines and newspapers, both in print and on the Web, are written by professional journalists who are not necessarily experts on the topics they are discussing. If the author is named in a byline, it's a good idea to use Google to find more information about their work. Some printed sources are generally more respected than others. For example, an article from the *New York Times* might carry more weight than an article from the *Bakersfield Californian*, because the *New York Times* is better known and well respected.

Point of View — Most articles have a bias of some kind, even if they are from well-respected sources. Even peer-reviewed scholarly journals have their own kind of lens through which they see the world. Many publications want to sway your opinion, whether they admit to it or not. Know if the publication has a commonly-recognized bias before you use it. Search the title of the website, magazine, newspaper or journal in Google and Wikipedia, and see what you find.

Purpose — Is the article only to be found on the Web? Or is it from a sensational tabloid, a newspaper, a popular magazine, a news magazine, a special interest magazine, a trade or professional magazine, or a scholarly journal? Does the author want to persuade? Teach? Inform? Entertain? Articles often fulfill more than one purpose, but think about this before you decide whether it's appropriate for *your* purposes and how *you* want to use it.