6. Evaluating Information

*Use the REVIEW criteria to test whether the resources you find are scholarly*

In your assignments, you will be required to use the most scholarly material possible to support your arguments. Scholarly means written by qualified academics or experts and is supported by research and references. You can test whether a source of information is scholarly by applying the REVIEW criteria. It is particularly critical to apply this test to material you find on the internet, as the information you see here may not have been subjected to the traditional publishing and editing processes used for books and journal articles.


**Relevance**

R is for Relevance

- How relevant is the resource to your topic or question?
- Does the resource provide a broad overview, or does it relate to just one aspect of your topic or question?
- Have you read a variety of sources to determine whether this one is useful?

Read your assessment question carefully and make sure you are familiar with the marking criteria. Ask yourself whether the resources you have found help you answer one or more of the key topics in the assessment task and marking criteria. To learn more about approaching your assessment tasks and using the marking criteria see the [Preparing Your Assessments](https://www.library.usyd.edu.au/skills/elearning/prin/iResearch_Print_SchVsNonSch.pdf) guide from the Student Learning Support website.

**Expertise**

E is for Expertise of the author

- What is the educational background of the author?
- Is this topic in the author’s area of expertise?
- Are they regularly cited by the other authors in the field?

The information you use for assessment tasks must come from authoritative sources. Books and ebooks, which have been published by well-regarded publishing houses, have already been verified by these institutions. Likewise, peer-reviewed journals have been checked by
a panel of experts or academics, before being published. These are usually good sources of information. However, the authors of other sources such as magazines, websites, news providers, Wikis and so on need to be identified and checked for authority or expertise. In these cases, ask yourself the three questions listed above. This information can be obtained from detailed records of items within the databases. You can also use ResearchGate or academic and institutional websites to run a background check on authors.

**Viewpoint**

V is for Viewpoint of the author or organisation

- Is the author or organisation associated with a particular view or position?
- What is the purpose of the resource? Is it intended to inform; to persuade; to entertain?

Is the evidence being presented in the resources you have found being used to advertise a product or perhaps persuade the reader for personal or financial gain. For example, studies and reports, which have been commissioned by pharmaceutical companies to ensure regulatory approval, are often highly criticised by the academic community and regulatory authorities. It is clear that such organisations have a lot to gain by persuading readers to a certain point of view.

**Intended Audience**

I is for Intended audience

- Who is the intended audience for the resource?
- Is the resource at the appropriate level for your needs? Is it too basic or too technical?

Material that is published for an academic or professional audience (some books, peer-reviewed and scholarly journals, some professional magazines) are acceptable for use in your assignments. However, many resources such as magazines, websites, blogs, wikis and so on, which are produced for popular consumption, often do not present information for academic discourse or by way of critical evaluation. These types of resources may not be appropriate for your assignments.
Evidence

E is for Evidence

- Have the authors cited appropriate evidence to back up their theories or conclusions?
- Is there a bibliography or reference section?
- Has the resource been through the peer review process?

It is particularly important that the resources you find, present information that has been collected, used and analysed in ways that are transparent. This means the data should be verifiable, checked by others (peer-reviewed) and follow standards appropriate for that field of study. Pay particular attention to websites which often look like they may be well researched but in fact offer no supporting documentation or do not disclose the methodology and sources used to collect the information presented.

When

W is for When

- When was the resource published?
- Is the information still current, or have there been further developments in the topic area?

Some assessment pieces specifically ask you to draw on current research or may even require you to limit your research to a particular date range, i.e. the last 5 or last 10 years. However, if dates are not explicitly stated, what is considered up-to-date information may change from field to field. Some areas of study change rapidly and you will want to use the most recent sources of information, while other assessment topics will require that you draw on important works and theorists from decades past. In these cases though, you will still want to include recent information on how these primary theories have been developed, analysed, criticised and so on, since their inception.

Tutorial Checklist

☐ I understand the difference between scholarly and non-scholarly information.
☐ I am able to use REVIEW to test the resources I find.
☐ I am aware that certain resources may not be suitable for use in my assignments.

Ask a librarian