Standards for Evaluating Resources for Citations

How do you evaluate the authority and appropriateness of resources, including books, articles, and Websites?

Suitability

- Scope – Does the breadth of the source match the nature of the author's topic?
- Audience – Does the resource fit? Too technical or not technical enough? Too basic or too advanced?

Authority – Can the author be identified? What are the credentials? Is the author cited elsewhere? Are links to the author in other trusted sources?

Publishing Body – Was there a peer review process? Is the organization recognized in the field of study? Is the document prepared as part of the author's professional duties and expertise?

Currency – Is the information dated? If currency isn't an issue, authorship or place in the historical record is important. Is a date of copyright included? The nature of the topic will determine whether or not dated information is too old.

Other indicators

- Documentation – Are citations used to authenticate the information?
- Objectivity – What is the point of view? Editorial? Research-based? Advocacy of a product or philosophy?
- Primary vs. secondary source – What is the nature of the source? Primary sources are preferred; on occasion primary sources are not available. Secondary sources are of value in pointing to primary sources. Because secondary sources are interpretations, they should be validated by consulting the primary sources.
- Websites – These pose a unique challenge in determining appropriateness of the source.
  - Is the author and title of article or database cited? Are the credentials cited? The reference must include all of this information in addition to the URL.
  - Does a group or organization sponsor the site? Read "About Us" to determine the philosophy and nature of the sponsor.
  - Is there a bias evident?
  - Is there a copyright date on the site? Is the site sufficiently up-to-date? Undated factual or statistical information should never be used; other materials, if not dated, should indicate source so credibility can be judged.
  - How credible and authentic are the links to other resources?

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- Wikipedia is not an acceptable citation, although this source may lead to an appropriate one.
- If a citation is not a known long-lived file, authors shall archive URL citations through http://www.webcitation.org before submitting manuscripts for publication.
- Authors shall ascertain the credibility of the electronic citation—ensuring that the author, credentials, and publication date are available—before choosing to archive the reference.

Teaching Library. (2007). Critical evaluation of resources. Berkeley, CA: University of California-Berkeley.
The Sheridan Libraries (2004). Evaluating information found on the Internet. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University.