Evaluating News Information Sources

It is important to evaluate the information you find. News sources are not written or reviewed by experts, and even among news sources quality can vary greatly. This is especially true with Internet sites, where anyone can publish information without any review.

Consider the following when evaluating information:

**Accuracy**

**HOW** was the resource written?
News articles can use language and images that are neutral or that are intentionally used to evoke certain emotional responses or to persuade, with or without facts.

- As a report, factually?
- As an opinion or column, with a point of view?
- As propaganda, highly biased? Or a more balanced perspective?
- Are sources or authorities cited? Is the information verifiable?

**Purpose**

**WHY** was the information published?
News articles are typically written to sell newspapers, ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints.

- To inform? To explain?
- To persuade? To sell?
- How much of the news article is meant to be sensationalist, to create excitement or fear?
- How much of the news article is meant to persuade you on one viewpoint?

**Source**

**WHERE** is the source found?
Typically news articles are found in newspapers, regular news sites, and professional newswires—all of varying quality and perspectives. Other types of news sources that can be of less quality are blogs, social media, and personal and other organizational sites.

- Recognized publication? Is the information from a respected or known publisher?
- Respected organization? Do you know the organization? Can others with authority and knowledge vouch for it?
- Organization that is overtly liberal, conservative, or has other bias? How much bias?
- Who typically reads information from this source and what are their expectations?
- Is the information neutral, offering different points of view?
- Is this hosted on a social media site, advocacy group, or regular news site?

**Authority & Influence**

**WHO** is responsible for the information in the source?
Typically news writers of newspapers are staff writers employed with the purpose of writing articles that will sell the newspaper. They are influenced by the mission of the newspaper and the company that owns it. News writers of other news sources may be anyone and may be influenced by their own agenda.

- Who is the author? What is the reputation of author/organization?
- Affiliation? Is it published to represent a certain viewpoint?
  - Look for “About Us,” “Mission,” or “Values” if you are on a website.
- What may be influencing the content, the slant, the argumentation?
Currency & Immediacy

WHEN was the source published?

News articles are typically published very close to an event it is reporting, which means the following:

- It may be very current - When was it written? When was it last revised?
- It may be missing important facts that have not come to light yet or have been published after this article
- It may be written too soon and not have all of the facts surrounding the event yet
- It may include an emotional response that the writer has not had time to process all of the information that individual has received
- It may be able to point you to a recent study that has just come out, which may be a source of research

Scope, Depth, & Context

WHAT is the subject of the source?

News articles typically cover a highly focused topic, event, person, or organization but do not go into much depth. News articles may highlight one aspect of a topic and put it out of context, leaving you the need to place it in context by reading additional materials. And news articles typically are not written by an expert on the topic.

- Do you need more in-depth knowledge?
- Where would you best find more information on the topic covered in the news article?
- Does the news article mention where you could find more information?

Think you know your own favorite newspaper well?

Read this article on Newspapers from Business Insider

Evaluating Accuracy & Validity: 6 Tips

Evaluation should always be a key step throughout your research. Whatever you read, watch, or listen to, keep in mind the following six guiding principles:

1. Always think actively and critically as you read
   Does the argument you are reading make sense?

2. No one is perfect
   Everyone makes mistakes, even those who write for a living.
   Again, does the argument make sense? Does the data presented support the argument? Can you verify the data?

3. "Unbiased information" is an oxymoron
   Everyone has an opinion or an agenda. How subjective is the presentation?

4. Never assume
   Make sure the opinion you read is backed by facts.

5. Appearances can be deceiving
   What has been presented? What has not been presented?
   Make sure that ALL the pertinent facts are presented in an argument, not just one side. Good research and the provision of quality information involve no cherry-picking.

6. A house stands or falls on its foundation
   Look at the sources cited by the writer, if there are any. Are they reliable, reputable, objective sources? If there aren’t any, do you need to find some?