

VI. Evaluate Research Materials

- Standards for Evaluating Materials in Public Administration
Materials need to be evaluated to determine their
1) usefulness, 2) quality, 3) authority. This is the next
major step you need to perform after discovering
your relevant research materials. In
evaluating information in the field of Public Administration,
you should apply the ten criteria below:
 1. Author's qualifications or credentials-
Is the author presently practicing in the field? Is he
knowledgeable in the field? How extensively has he
published on the topic?
 2. The Timeliness of the Publication- Your topic may require
information from a certain time-frame. For example, if you
were researching changes in the federal civil service in the
George Bush administration, you would need recent
information. Check the publication dates. Is the
information updated regularly, if so, how
often is it updated? Some information are
updated daily, some weekly and monthly.
Is the information still valid for your
topic? If recent changes have superseded less recent ones,
then you will the most current information. Then again, if
you are writing on a topic that has more of a historical
interest, e.g., civil service reforms in Franklin Roosevelt's
administration, then timeliness would not be so important.
 3. Accurate and Factual Information Supported
by Evidence- Does your information come from respected
sources? Let's say you got information from a journal in a
database; you would want to ask if the journal is refereed,
i.e., is it reviewed by authorities in the field. If it is not,
then the journal would be less authoritative. There may be a
review available of the source, if your source is a book.
If you obtained the
information from a web site, how stable
or permanent is the information? Some web information is
here today and gone tomorrow; other web information is
more permanent. Complete coverage of your topic is
another thing to look for: check indexes, tables of contents,
etc. to find out more. Another consideration is whether the
piece is well documented. E.g., is there is a quote from
Franklin Roosevelt, is there a footnote stating the source.
Without documentation you may not be able to verify much
information.
 4. Primary vs. Secondary Sources- You can

locate your information from two types of materials:

Primary Sources: These are the first-hand or eye-witness accounts of an event. They include, newspaper stories, reports of experiments, statistics, government documents, autobiographies and letters.

Secondary Sources: These are the sources that perform an operation on the primary source, such as analysis, evaluation, or criticism.

5. **Reputation of the Publisher-** Check out the publisher of the source. If the publisher is a university press then it is likely to be scholarly. Also, a publisher that has been around for awhile should have a reputation or track record that suggests reliability. Even though you cannot always guarantee quality based on the publisher's reputation, it may be a sign that the publisher has a regard for the type of sources it publishes. For example, M.E. Sharpe, CQ Press, Sage Publications, United Nations Publications, Government Finance Officers' Association, and Health Administration Press are scholarly publishers in Public Administration and other areas.

6. **Type of Publication-** is the source scholarly, popular, trade or government publication? Is the journal scholarly or popular? You need to make a distinction because it indicates different levels of complexity in introducing ideas.

Scholarly Journals- the Websters

Third International Dictionary definition of a scholarly journal is a publication that is concerned with academic study, especially research; exhibiting the methods and attitudes of a scholar; and having a manner and appearance of a scholar. These journals usually have a serious look and contain various graphs, charts and other statistical information. The articles in these journals always cite

their resources in the form of footnotes or bibliographies. The authors of the articles are scholars in the field or someone who has done research in the field. The language used is discipline related. Scholarly journals aim to report on original research or experimentation and disseminate it for scholarly use. Examples of Scholarly Journals include, American Review Of Public Administration, Analysis Of Social Issues And Public Policy, BYU Journal Of Public Law, Canadian Public Administration, American Review Of Public Administration, Journal Of Public Administration Research And Theory and others.

General Interest and News

Publications- These publications are attractive in appearance, their format can be a journal or a newspaper. The articles contained in these sources may be written by editorial staff, scholars or free lance writers. They use nontechnical language to appeal to a wide audience. They are published by commercial entities, individuals and/or professional organizations. The aim of these sources is to provide information to a broad audience.

Some examples are Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, Popular Mechanics, Scientific American, New York Times, National Geographic.

Popular Journals- these sources are attractive in appearance. They contain many photographs, drawings. They very rarely cite sources and information they contain are usually second or third hand. The articles are in general with very little depth. The popular journals are for entertaining the reader, selling products or promoting a viewpoint.

Some examples are People Weekly, Traditional Homes, Vogue, Good Housekeeping, Southern Living, Essence and others.

Sensational, Tabloid Publications- use elementary language that is often sensational. They aim to arouse curiosity with flashy headlines. Some examples are National Inquirer, Globe, Weekly World News, Star, and others.

- Evaluation of Web Resources

You can find a vast amount of information on the Internet, however, not all resources are equally valuable or even reliable. Your challenge is to sift through the vast amount of information and pinpoint those sources that are reliable and relevant for your topic. As a rule the, informational web pages present factual information. For example, the web pages with URL addresses that end with .edu or .gov provide reliable information since they are sponsored by educational institutions or government agencies. You may consider the following points in evaluating web sources:

1. Scope- Is the information complete and given in detail?
2. Content- Is the information accurate or factual? Many web pages simply restate the opinion of the author or the opinions of others. Opinions may be stated as though they were facts; this is something you need to watch out for. Are there sources listed for the information given that can be double-checked. Is the information biased? Sometimes information is given without the name of an organization or person to whom the information can be attributed. Such information is suspect. Sometimes an author sounds authoritative, but may have little or no background in the field. You can check for credentials of the author. How current is the information? Do you see dates as to when it was written

and when it was last revised or updated?

3. Graphics and Multimedia Design- Is the Page attractive and Interesting to look at?
4. Navigation- is the web resource easy to use? Is it user friendly? Can you access the resource via standard computer equipment and software?