

Evaluating Research Sources

Questions to ask about a secondary source:

1. Who is the author?
 - What are his/her credentials and professional affiliation?
 - What is his/her area of expertise?
 - Does the author have a bias or ulterior motive?
 - What else has the author written?
2. What is the date of the publication?
 - Is it more than twenty years old?
 - Is it the latest edition, or is there a revised edition available?
3. Who is the publisher?
 - A university press? A scholastic publisher? A commercial publisher?
 - Is a journal article from a peer-reviewed journal? Does the journal have an editorial slant?
4. Content
 - Is there a bibliography? An index? Footnotes?
 - Are key concepts and technical terms clearly defined?
 - Are statements supported by evidence? Is the evidence up-to-date?
 - Are his conclusions based on a single piece of evidence?
 - Is the counter-evidence examined?
 - Is the author objective and impartial, or does he use inflammatory language?
 - Is the information presented as fact or opinion?
 - Are his arguments supported by other works on the subject?
5. Coverage
 - Does the work update other works? Does it substantiate other works?
 - Does it add new information?
 - Is it a broad overview, a comprehensive in-depth survey, or a narrow focus on a specific aspect of the subject?
 - What is the intended audience?
 - Is the publication popular or scholarly? What age level is targeted?
6. Can you find book reviews for a book?
 - Do different reviewers agree about the book? Do they suggest other titles that might be better?

“Constant vigilance!”