# Criteria for Evaluating Print Resources

You will need to evaluate each resource you use for your research. Use the questions below to critically analyze materials and to assess how useful they will be for your research. Keep in mind that most publications have a particular bias or agenda. If the resource is in the UBC library you may assume it has some academic relevance and/or credibility because University librarians and other professionals have already made evaluative decisions for you by adding it to the collection. You may not be able to answer every question for all resources, but the questions should help you define whether resources are relevant to your research topic.

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| **Author** | • You might recognize the author's name as someone who is credible in his/her field of research.<br>• Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies? Take note if an author appears repeatedly as this might indicate works of importance. A substantial body of work by the same author can also indicate expertise in a particular subject area.<br>• But not all works by important authors are important or even show expertise in a particular field. For example Erwin Shrodinger, the Austrian physicist who received the Nobel Prize in 1933 in recognition of his development of the wave formalism of quantum mechanics, published a paper in 1947 on general relativity and unified field theory. Schrodinger was so excited about his results that he rushed to publish without thinking critically about them. The work was significantly flawed and was dismissed by Einstein. Schrodinger is a very important author, but that work is of no importance (other than as a fine example of human fallibility).<br>• You've never heard of the author? Look at the biographical information in the publication for information about the author's credentials. Also look on the internet as most people who write textbooks and other academic/scholarly materials will appear there. Look for information about where they work, what other materials they have published, and what others engaged in similar research have to say about their work/ideas/theories/beliefs. |
| **Date of Publication** | • When was the material published? Is it current or out-of-date for your topic? For rapidly changing topics it may be necessary to use very current information, depending on what kind of report or research you are doing.<br>• Some older works are good at presenting a historical perspective which may be especially important for some disciplines or topics.<br>• Some research though dated may be the 'seminal' work in a field, or represent a summary of everything known to date about a particular topic. Such research might represent the starting point of a new discipline, or the jumping off point of a new way of looking at a problem. An example of such a publication is Alan Turing's article, "The Chemical Basis of Morphogenesis," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, London, 237B, 37-72, 14 August 1952. |
| **Publisher** | • Many publishers specialize in particular areas. Over time you will begin to recognize publishers in your field of study. University presses, government bodies, professional associations and scholarly societies are generally reputable.<br>• Examples: University of British Columbia Press, Harvard University Press, American Chemical Society. Keep in mind a reputable publisher does not guarantee quality. |
| **Edition or Revision** | • Be aware that multiple editions may exist.<br>• Further editions will include revisions, changes in information, updates in |

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| | knowledge that may be important to know for your research. |
| **Content** | • Keep in mind that your topic may be covered in one chapter, or one part of a book or proceedings.<br>• To evaluate content begin by asking is there a table of contents, an index and a bibliography. These criteria indicate a well written and navigable work.<br>• Is your topic covered in enough depth to be useful?<br>• If at first you don't find your topic discussed, try searching for it by synonyms in the index. |
| **Coverage** | • Does the work update other sources, support other works you have read, or add new information? Does it cover your topic extensively, or minimally? Make sure to analyze enough sources to obtain a range of viewpoints. Don't get drawn into one author's way of viewing things! |
| **Audience** | • Who is the intended audience? Is the publication aimed at a general or a specialized audience?<br>• Is the source too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your research needs?<br>• Is the information in the resource fact, opinion, or propaganda? What is the difference between fact and opinion? Facts are usually verifiable. Opinions may be based on factual information, but evolve from the interpretation of facts. Keep in mind that in scientific writing more options exist than these three. For example, scientists develop interpretations of data from several points of view successively in their writing; each point of view expresses the implications of a different assumption. Think of these writings as the interpretations themselves (i.e. a record of the process of interpreting). That record of process is extremely valuable to you when you find and recognize it because it gives you models for your own thought (either to emulate or avoid).<br>• Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched? Or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Academic or scholarly materials are usually based on extensive and thorough research.<br>• Do the ideas and arguments agree with other works on the same topic? Disagreement does not discount the work, but if an author radically departs from the views of others in the same field be extra careful when evaluating the work. |