Evaluating information sources

Always evaluate any information sources you want to use in your assignments. Using good quality sources can help you get better marks. So, how can we evaluate sources?

Timeliness
- Is the information current?
- When was it last updated (especially websites)?

Relevance
- Is it actually relevant to your topic?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is it appropriate to use for your assignment?

Authority
- Who is the author and what are their qualifications?
- What other work has the author published in this area?

Accuracy
- Is the information supported with evidence/references?
- Can it be verified in other sources?
- Are there obvious errors?

Purpose
- Why was the information written?
- Is the information objective?
- Is there any bias or agenda present?

If you can’t sufficiently answer these questions, it’s probably best not to use the source in your assignment.

Let’s look at an example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeliness</th>
<th>Published in 2018 (very recent!).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>For linguistics, English, or culture this might be suitable - if web sites are OK to use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Written by Linguistics lecturers at an Australian university (academic credibility!).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>No noticable errors; all links work; sources appear to be quoted correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Clearly stated as an ‘Opinion’ piece, but still uses information from other sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdict?</td>
<td>May be a good option if you can’t find a book or journal article on the same topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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