Transcript for Evaluation Video

Welcome to the Mundt Library at Dakota State University. We are here to help you with all of your information needs whether it be research for a class or personal interest in a topic. If you have any questions, feel free to ask a librarian.

In this video you will learn about the importance of evaluating information and be exposed to various criteria that can be applied when evaluating sources. The learning objectives that will be addressed include: learning the importance of evaluating sources, becoming familiar with evaluation criteria, and being able to note that the importance of the various evaluation criteria varies depending on specific information needs.

Evaluation is a necessary and ongoing part of life. When you evaluate anything you are looking at the characteristics of a choice, weighing the pros and cons and then making a decision. Evaluate the following situation and determine what you would do. You have a biology test and you want to wear your lucky Bermuda shorts. It is 5 degrees outside and there is a foot of snow on the ground. You must pass the test or you will fail the course. You are from Florida and have no tolerance for the cold. What is your choice? Is the magic in your lucky shorts worth the chance of frostbite? You must continually evaluate. Say you have had a boyfriend or girlfriend for two years and are considering whether to continue the relationship. You need to weigh the positives and negatives of their personality to yours considering both of your longtime goals in life.

Given the fact that you are constantly making evaluative judgments, it should come as no surprise that you should do the same for the sources you use when conducting research. While we often base our decisions using a gut reaction, there is an available check list of criteria to assist in evaluating sources. The five criteria include: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage. For each of the criteria, there are questions that you can ask of the source to help your evaluation.

When determining whether a source is accurate, you should consider the following questions. Is the information reliable and error free? Is there an editor or someone who verified or checks the information? Is it peer-reviewed? Is there adequate documentation: a bibliography, footnotes, credits, quotations? Are the conclusions justified by the information presented? Is the information verified in other sources? Do experts agree on the findings?

When you look at the authority of a source you should consider the following questions. Is the source of the information reputable? What are the author’s qualifications? Are they a staff reporter or a scholar in the field? How did you find the information? Did you use an electronic periodical database, references from the bibliography of another work, or an internet search engine? What type of source is it? Popular or scholarly? What is the reputation of the publisher? If there is no individual author, who is taking responsibility for the source?
When you are determining the objectivity of a source consider the following questions. Does the information show bias? What is the purpose of the information? To inform? Persuade? Explain? Sway opinion? Advertise? Do other sources provide other viewpoints? Are any conclusions justified by facts or data?

When you are looking at the currency of a source, consider the following questions. When was the information published? When was the information collected? Is it current? Does it reflect the time period about which you are concerned?

When looking at the coverage of a source, consider the following questions. Does it provide the evidence or information you need? Does it answer questions you have about the topic? Is the audience for which it is intended appropriate for your purposes? Is it for a professional or layperson, a child or adult? Is it suitable for your level of understanding? Too simple or too complex? Is the information in an appropriate format? Print, electronic, video, audio? Does it cover the topic you need? Do the findings support or refute your original ideas on the topic?

Now that you know the criteria, it is time to use them in evaluating your sources. However, in order to effectively evaluate a source, you not only need to apply the criteria questions, but you must also consider the context of your specific information need. You are doing a critical analysis of the structure of Bach’s Toccata & Fugue in D Minor. Will an article written in 1972 provide you with the needed information? You are studying computer viruses to see how you could protect your business’s network. You find a blog written by someone claiming to be a hacker. Will you use the information? You are writing a paper on single sex schools. Would the admission’s page of Hollins University, an all girls college, provide you with quality information?

As you can see in some cases, there is not an easy answer as to whether a source should be used. Yet, whether you decide to use a source or not, it is vital for you to evaluate it. By answering questions related to the evaluation criteria, you will be able to make an informed decision and provide analysis as to why you used a specific source.

Unfortunately, all sources are not created equal, so remember to evaluate, evaluate, evaluate. If you have any questions about evaluating a source, feel free to ask a librarian. They will be able to aid you with the criteria.

**Answers to Quiz Questions**

- Will an article written in 1972 on Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D Minor provide you with quality information? Yes or No?
  - Yes. Often subjects in the humanities such as music place less importance on the date of information.
- Will you use the blog written by a self proclaimed hacker for information on the computer virus? Yes or No?
  - No. As you cannot be sure of the qualifications of the blogger, it would be wise to double check any information.
Would the admission's page of Hollins University, an all girls college, provide you with quality information? Yes or No?
  o No. Since the college has an interest in showing single sex schools in a positive light, the information may be biased. By acknowledging the bias, you should be able to react to the information appropriately.