Information Skills Tutorial
Evaluating Resources
Evaluate your results

Once you have found some information on your topic it is a good idea to evaluate it for accuracy and reliability, especially if you are using information from the internet.

Anyone can put together a webpage on a topic and sometimes it can be difficult to tell whether a site is reliable or not.

The following tips will help you decide if the information you’ve found is reliable and appropriate for use in your assignment.
Is the information appropriate for my assignment?

The first thing you need to determine is whether the information is appropriate for your assignment.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you decide:

**Does the information help me answer my assignment question?**

**Is the information up to date?**

If you are looking for current information, check the publication date before you decide to use something.

When using information from the internet look for the date the information was first published and when it was last update. You can usually find this by scrolling to the bottom of the page.
Who created this information?

Next ask yourself:

Who created this information? Is an author clearly identified?

To find the author of a website look for a link labelled *About us* or *About the authors*, or look for information about the author at the bottom of the page.
Is the website supported by an official organisation, such as a government body, an educational institution, a non-profit organisation or a company?

Sometimes this will be clearly stated on the website, but you can also tell by the domain name.

For example:

.gov is used for government websites, like this: http://www.nsw.gov.au/.

.edu is used for websites created by educational institutions

.org is used for non-profit organisations

.com is often used by companies and private individuals.
Does the author have the appropriate education, training, or experience to write with authority on this topic?

Once again this information should be displayed on the About us page of a website.

Sometimes you can also work this out from the context of a webpage. For example a government website is the appropriate place to find reliable information on government policy. A website maintained by an educational institution should only publish research by qualified individuals.

If you cannot find any information about the creators of the site, or if the site is presenting itself as an authoritative source, but the author’s have no qualifications or experience in the subject area, think carefully before using the information in your assignment.
Is this information biased?

When using the internet to find information for your assignments you need to beware of biased information. Biased information only presents one point of view, or one side of an argument. It is often inaccurate, or incomplete.

To work out whether a source is biased try asking yourself the following questions:

Is more than one viewpoint provided?

Is the author prejudiced against or towards a particular group?

What is the purpose of the site? Is it trying to persuade the audience, to sell something or to inform?
Does the author provide evidence to support what they’re saying?
For example if they quote statistics do they clearly state where the statistics came from?
If they quote other research do they provide a reference list, detailing the publication details of that research?

Does the site contain advertising that may be a conflict of interest with the content?
For example if a site is about the benefits of a weight loss shake, and it includes advertising for weight loss shakes, it is probably presenting a biased point of view.
Getting help…

If you would like some help evaluating information for your assignments you can contact your local TAFE Library for more advice and assistance.

You can also view the other tutorials in the Information Skills series.