Evaluating Background Resources

When you are evaluating online resources as you search for background information, it is especially important to ask questions about authorship and publication.

Use the following criteria to select resources that are valid, accurate, and appropriate for your research:

Authority:

- Who is the author/source/editor/publisher?
- Can you verify the author’s credentials, expertise, or qualifications?
- Is there contact information for the author, editor, publisher or sponsoring organization?

Objectivity:

- Does the author represent a particular set of world views?
- Does the content show bias or preference for a specific point of view?
- Are services or products being promoted or advertised?

Accuracy:

- Can information be verified in other sources?
- Has the content been reviewed or refereed?
- Is the information supported by evidence and are sources cited?
- Are there spelling, grammar, or typographical errors?

Purpose:

- What is the purpose of this information – to inform, educate, entertain, sell, persuade?
- Who is the intended audience – consumers, researchers, students, experts?

Scope:

- How comprehensive is the information?
- Does this provide a general overview or in-depth analysis?

Currency:

- When was this published?
- Has this information been revised, rebutted, or updated?