Evaluating Information Resources

When you find information, it is important to think about it and evaluate its usefulness and quality. For example, newspapers have a political bias which you need to bear in mind when reading them. Individuals and pressure groups may present only the information which supports their point of view. In this respect, information on the Web is notoriously unreliable. Information in books and periodicals may also be unreliable, or it may represent only one point of view. Just because something appears in print, doesn't always mean it is true. You need to evaluate all information, wherever it is found.

Printed and electronic resources made available by the Library have usually gone through peer review where quality and reliability are checked before publication, or they have been selected for their quality and relevance. However, you will still find unreliable material which may have been discredited or which has slipped through the net. Most Web resources have no peer review system (except electronic research journals) and they often have entertainment or commercial aims making them unreliable.

Use the criteria shown here to help you decide if the information you have found is going to be suitable for you to use.

Purpose: Is it a summary of the subject or an in depth survey?
Audience: Is it aimed at specialist, knowledgeable audience or the general public?
Authority: Is it published by a well-known academic publisher or author, or is it Joe Bloggs giving his opinion?
Coverage: Does it cover a whole topic or just one aspect?
Currency: Is it up to date? Is it still relevant?
Accuracy: Has it been checked by a reliable editor?
Objectivity: Does the author cover all sides of the subject, or is it one, possibly biased, view?
Reliability: Is the author someone who is well known and respected? Is someone making everything up?