

Is this what I want?

How to decide if a book, article,
website, pamphlet, etc.
is giving me reliable and helpful information.

No source of information is perfect. Depending on the source,
and what you want to use it for, different tests will be
more or less important. Use your own judgment to decide
if your source passes these tests.

The first seven tests are important. If your source does not pass them, you should think about looking for other information.

1. I can tell where it came from.

- It clearly says where the information came from and/or how it was collected and who collected it. (It may say where the information came from at the end of the article, chapter or book, or it may appear within the information itself in a sentence like: "In a report released this week by Statistics Canada...")
- I trust the people who collected this information and the method they used. (I can use this booklet to decide if I trust the people who collected this information and the method they used to collect it.)

2. Everything important was considered.

- Anything that might have affected the information was considered when it was collected. For instance, a person that is collecting information about how wool socks affect foot odour would need to consider:
 - what kinds of shoes people wore because maybe their shoes caused the foot odour.
 - what kinds of bacteria people had on their feet because maybe the bacteria caused the foot odour.
 - what kind of foot odour people have when wearing other kinds of socks because maybe their feet were just as smelly when they wore cotton socks.
- It says which things that might affect the information were not considered, or had to be left out.

3. It is about the right people.

- If the information is about people, it clearly says what age, sex, race, class, sexual orientation, location, lifestyle, health status etc. this information applies to.
- It applies to the people I am looking for information about.

4. The people responsible for it are trustworthy.

- The people who wrote it, sponsored it, paid for it, or published it are clearly stated.
- They have created and published reliable information about this subject before.
- They have good education or experience in this subject.
- They are considered experts by trusted people, associations, or groups.
- They do not have beliefs that might bias this information OR they clearly explain their beliefs and that there are other sides to the issue / topic.
- They are not being given money or other benefits for saying that this is good information.

5. It is fair.

- It presents many points of view OR it tells me that it is presenting only one view and that there are other sides to the issue / topic.
- It does not try to convince me that one thing is right and everything else is wrong.
- It does not try to convince me that one belief is right and other beliefs are wrong.
- It does not use emotional language.
- It does not claim that all of something is the same. For example, it does not claim that all women love "chick-flicks" and hate football.
- It does not try to get me to buy or pay for anything.

6. Other experts, reliable sources, or trusted people agree with this information.

- They tell people to use this source.
- They have written positive reviews of this source.
- They use this source when they are creating other information.
- They give people the same information that this source does.

7. It is not too old or too new.

- If it is in a quickly changing subject area, like medicine or computer technology, it is less than 2 years old.
- Newer information from a trusted source agrees with this source.
- Trusted people have had a chance to look at this information and decide if it is any good.

If your book, article, website or other source of information has not passed the tests so far, you should look for a different source.

If it has passed, there are a few more tests to put it through to make sure it is useful. If you are looking at a website make sure you consider the issues listed in section 12.

8. It was written for me.

- Most or all of the information I am looking for is here.
- It was written for people who know as much about this subject as I do.
- If I only know a little, it is written for people who only know a little.
- If I know a lot, it is written for people who know a lot.

9. It says what things are missing and why.

- It clearly says what is not yet known about the subject.
- It clearly says what information has not been included in this source.

10. It makes sense.

- The information is clear and easy to understand.
- It does not use words that I don't understand or made-up words.
- It does not say one thing is true and then say that something different is true. For instance: it does not say that a □ is the same as a ○ and then say that a □ is different than a ○.

11. It is about the right place.

- The information is Canadian.

OR

- It is about a subject that is the same no matter where you are (for example: how to solve math problems, the form and function of the human digestive tract, how glass is made, the symptoms of diabetes etc.)

OR

- I'm not looking for Canadian information; this information is from the place that I want information about.

There are some things that you need to think about just for websites.

12. About websites:

- The site has been kept up to date. At the bottom of the page or article it says when it was last updated.
- Any links that the site has to other pages work; they take me to other pages with useful information.
- There is contact information available for the people responsible for the site, and it is up to date.
- The site does not want information from me.

OR

The site:

- provides a good reason why it wants my information
- tells me what it will do with my information

For more information about deciding if you are being given reliable information:

A User's Guide to Finding and Evaluating Health Info on the Web.

Medical Library Association

<http://www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html>

How to find the most trustworthy health information web sites

Canadian Health Network

<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/>

Choose English or French, then go to Help (just above the search box), then click on "How to find the most trustworthy health information web sites."

Evaluating Information

Purdue University Libraries

<http://www.lib.purdue.edu/rguides/studentinstruction/evaluation/index.html>

The Quality Information Checklist

<http://www.quick.org.uk/menu.htm>

Evaluating Information Resources

James A. Gibson Library, Brock University

<http://www.brocku.ca/library/evalinfo.htm>



Women's Health Care Centre
Peterborough Regional Health Centre
157 Charlotte Street Peterborough, Ontario K9J 2T7
(705) 743-4132 or 1-800-419-3111
www.prhc.on.ca/womenshealth

PRHC
Peterborough Regional
Health Centre