



# Questioning and evaluating information

## Introduction

When discovering information there are a wide range of sources available to you such as textbooks, journal articles, newspaper articles and social media sources.

The content, reliability, and usefulness will vary between sources and you could be presented with contentious approaches, biased information, inaccurate explanations, and even mis- and disinformation.

It is crucial to critically evaluate the information that you have found by **asking questions of each piece of information**. You need to assess if it is relevant to your topic and appropriate for your task, and you need to determine how you will use it.

The questions you need to consider will vary depending on the type of information source, and the requirements of your assignment and discipline.

## Questioning the item

- Is the item appropriate for your present task?
  - Establish what kind of source it is. Some sources aim to be introductory and others provide a more specialised and in-depth analysis.
- Is it a primary or secondary research source?
- Is it peer-reviewed?
- What is the purpose of the source?
- How much attention has the source received?
  - Metrics (citation metrics and altmetrics) are quantitative measures designed to help evaluate research outputs by tracking attention received.

## Questioning the content

- Is the content relevant to your topic?
- How does it fit within your reasoning?
- Is it supporting your argument, or providing an alternative viewpoint?
- Will it be useful for exploring a particular aspect of your theory or for more general background investigation?
- Are the points made backed up by research?
- Are the conclusions in line with other research on the topic? If not, why not?

- Is there a piece of research that you feel is missing and it has not been mentioned? Why?
- Are the research methods used valid and reliable? Are they delineated so you can understand them?

## Questioning the author/creator

- Is it clear who created it?
- What do you know about the creator?
- What else have they written?
- Are they influential in their field?
  - Finding out how often and where an author has been cited can give an indication of the influence or reputation of an author.
- Who are they funded by or do they work for a particular organisation?

## Questioning the currency

- When was it published?
- How current is the information?
  - The importance of this will vary according to the topic and scope of your research.
- Why has this information appeared at this point in time? Is it a reaction to an event or another piece of research?
- Have more recent sources cited this research? Have they reproduced, refuted or built upon the original conclusions?

## Summary

Questioning and evaluating information is a crucial aspect of critical thinking.

Thinking critically about your information sources is an essential part of your studies at University. Your work will benefit from using reliable and appropriate information and showing you have researched your information sources.

For more Questioning resources see: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/study/research-skills/questioning>



Except otherwise noted, this work by The University of Sheffield Library is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercialShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.