

For Periodical Articles and Books

Date of the Article or Book

1. In what year was it written? Is this current enough to be of use for your topic?

How to do this: For books, look for the date of publication on the title page (often on the back of the title page). For articles, look for the publication date of the volume in which the article appears.

2. What is the date of the most current item listed in the bibliography?

How to do this: Scan the bibliography or list of sources (if there is one) to see how current the sources are. Bibliographies are usually at the ends of articles or books.

The Author; His/Her Background and Point of View

1. What are the author's credentials? Are they enough to make you trust what they write on this topic?

How to do this: For *articles*, look for a brief paragraph about the author either at the bottom of the first page or at the end of the article. Is the author a scholar or researcher in the subject of the article, a journalist of staff writer, a freelance writer? Does the author's background match the general subject of the article. For *books*, look for biographical details either in the front of the book or somewhere at the end, after the main contents.

You can also find sources for biographical research in the "Biography" section of *InfoTree*. Start by looking up your person in *Biography Resource Center*; use other sources as needed.

2. Does the information you discover about the author, the institution, or the journal, make you wonder whether there could be a bias, either hidden or explicit?

How to do this: For *articles*, search by author—last name first—in *Academic Search Complete* or other article databases. For *books*, search by author—last name first—in ALICE, the OhioLINK Library Catalog and (or a really thorough search) in *Open WorldCat*

3. How many other articles or books has the author written?

How to do this: For *articles*, search by author in one or more article databases (you may be able to click on the author's name in one record to see his/her other articles in that database; to be thorough, you may want to try more than one database). For *books*, start with an Author search in ALICE; try first the OhioLINK Library Catalog, then Open WorldCat for more complete results.

4. Does the author simply wish to inform or is this an opinion piece aimed at persuading the reader in some way?

How to do this: there is no substitute for reading carefully, and looking for opinions and "loaded" words that indicate the author's point of view.

5. Is the source of funding for the author's research indicated? If so, how might the research have been affected?

How to do this: For *articles*, look on the first page of the article or at the end to see if there are any acknowledgments of funding provided for the research reported. For example, drug research funded by a pharmaceutical company may well be slanted to favor that company's products. For *books*, look in the front and read the Introduction, Acknowledgments or other prefatory matter to try to discover any sources of external funding.

The Book or Article Itself

1. Is there a bibliography or list of references? If so, how many items are in it? Is it long enough and current enough for you to believe the author did the necessary background work?

How to do this: look at the end of the *article* or *book*. Compare the dates of the most recent sources listed there with the publication date of the book or article.

2. For *articles*: Using the information in *Academic Search Complete*, what is the description of the journal?

How to do this: while viewing a *full record* for an article in *Academic Search Complete* (or other EBSCOhost database), click on the title of the publication in the Source field to learn a little bit about the periodical itself.

3. For *books*: Look for book reviews.

How to do this: for fairly recent (last 10-15 years or so) books, *Academic Search Complete* is a good place to start: use the Search Limiter "Document Type: Book Review" and search for the title of the book. For other sources of book reviews, see our page on book reviews: www.library.ohiou.edu/find/books-reviews.html.

For Web Pages

In addition to the criteria outlined above, web pages/websites have some special considerations:

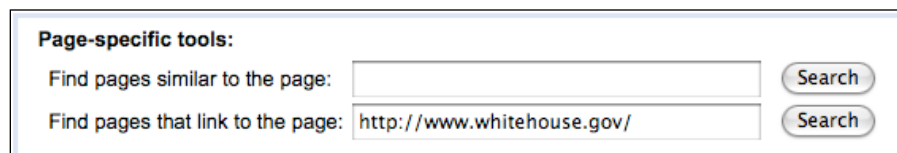
1. When was the page last updated?

How to do this: Look for this information in tops or bottoms of pages. Is it current enough to be of use for your topic?

2. Check for links both **from** and **to** the page/site:

How to do this: Does the page have links to other pages or sites on the topic? Are these links up-to-date: a large number of dead links is a sign that the page containing them is not being maintained well.

On the other hand, you can use Google to see how many *other* pages link to a page by going to Google's Advanced Search page, clicking on "Date, usage rights, numeric range, and more" and then using the second of the "Page-specific tools."



The image shows a screenshot of a search interface titled "Page-specific tools:". It contains two rows of search options. The first row is "Find pages similar to the page:" followed by an empty text input box and a "Search" button. The second row is "Find pages that link to the page:" followed by a text input box containing the URL "http://www.whitehouse.gov/" and a "Search" button.

3. Is the site listed in a directory of high-quality sites?

How to do this: see if the site shows up in any of these directories: infomine.ucr.edu, lii.org, about.com, academicinfo.net, www.intute.ac.uk, or other similar subject listings of good websites.

4. What is the site's domain?

How to do this: Although the system is far from perfect, the following list gives an several kinds of sites, as defined by their domains (last part of the URL):

- .gov — government agencies
- .edu — educational institutions
- .org — organizations, usually non-profit
- .com — commercial businesses, including companies that host personal websites and blogs
- .mil — the military
- .net — organizations related to the Internet itself, such as a local Internet Service Provider
- .uk — Sample domain for a country, in this case the United Kingdom

While the type of domain is not a guarantee of reliable information, generally speaking site from .gov or .edu or .org domains are more reliable than those from dot-coms.