

CRITICALLY APPRAISING CONTENT: GUIDING QUESTIONS

To appraise the content of a source, **you judge** whether it is good. The more you read and retain, the better you can judge the value of a source. Consider the following aspects of content as you read, and ask yourself the associated questions. Rank your sources against each other and only use the best ones.

Purpose

1) In the introduction, what does the author state as their purpose for writing? Do they follow through on this statement in the rest of the work?

Intended audience

- 1) Who is the intended audience of the work? General members of the public, industry experts, academics?
- 2) Does the publication fit your needs? Is it too basic, too technical, or too off-topic?

Objectivity

- 1) Does the author seem overtly biased in the piece? Do they use evocative and emotional language?
- 2) Does the author have any conflicts of interest, explicit or otherwise (e.g. an author employed by a pharmaceutical company, writing about a new drug)?
- 3) Does the author offer facts, or opinion? When opinion is offered, is it well-supported with reference to evidence? Is this evidence reputable, or biased itself?
- 4) Does the author address differing points of view? Do they offer logical counter-arguments to opposing stances?

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Reasoning

- 1) Does the author situate their work within the other literature on the topic? Do they omit any key sources?
- 2) Is the methodology used appropriate for the topic and discipline? Are there better approaches?
- 3) Does the author premise their arguments on reliable data, sources, and evidence? Do they misrepresent or miss anything?
- 4) Does the author make reasonable assumptions?

Organization

- 1) Does the publication have all the appropriate sections for a work of its type, organized in a logical manner (e.g. introduction, literature review, methods, methodology, discussion, results, conclusion)?
- 2) Does the work flow smoothly from section to section, or are thoughts disorganized and scattered?
- 3) Does the author clearly communicate their main ideas?

The more a publication fails the above questions, the more problematic it is, and the more careful you should be in using the source.

Aside from using the guiding questions above, you can also appraise books by reading reviews written by others. Reading book reviews can help you understand if you are appraising works appropriately.



FIND A BOOK REVIEW