Evaluate Sources

Knowing where information is coming from, who wrote it and why they wrote it, is an important step in doing research. When you find a new source of information, ask yourself the following questions.

Currency: When was it written?
- Does the webpage tell when the article was last updated or written?
- Does the date make sense for the assignment? If you are researching current events, information from 10 years ago in not good.

Relevance or Coverage:
- Is the article focused on one topic or does it discuss many topics?
- Is the article edited, abridged, or added to in any way?
- Can you see the whole article? Or is it just an abstract?

Authority: Who wrote it?
- Is the author’s name easy to find?
- Does the author know about the topic? Has she written other articles on the topic? Does he have an educational background on the topic?
- Is there contact information for the author or the publisher?
  - For websites, check the bottom of the page for contact and copyright information.

Accuracy: Is the information correct or supported by evidence?
- Is there a bibliography or links to other sources used by the author?
- Does the author give evidence or facts that can be checked? Has the article been peer-reviewed?
- Is the article written well and has no errors in spelling or grammar?

Purpose: Why was it written?
- Is the body of the article separate from any advertisements? Are advertisements labeled?
- Is the information labeled as “Opinion” or “Editorial?” Articles with these labels can mean that the author is writing what he or she feels about a topic, not based on facts or evidence.
- Is the author part of or the website for a non-profit organization, a political party, or in support of a cause?
  - For websites, look at the end of the address for the domain name (.com, .org, .gov, .edu). .com is for companies who might be trying to sell something, .gov is for government sites, and .org is usually for non-profit groups who often have a specific point of view.
- For whom was the article written? Resources meant for children may only have very general facts. Some teachers require sources meant for other scholars.

http://libguides.umflint.edu/evaluating_resources