A Guide to Evaluating Resources
Scholarly vs. Non-Scholarly, Primary vs. Secondary, and Internet/WWW

Scholarly vs. Non-Scholarly Journals
Review the comparative criteria to help you determine if a journal and/or journal article is of a scholarly nature.

	Scholarly journal article	Non-scholarly journal article
Purpose	To share with other scholars the results of primary research and experiments.	To entertain or inform in a broad, general sense.
Audience	Researchers; Academic faculty & students	General public
Author	A respected scholar or researcher in the field; an expert on the topic; authors' names are always noted.	A journalist or feature writer; authors' names not always noted.
Publisher	A professional association; a university or scholarly commercial publisher.	A commercial publisher.
Appearance	Very basic layout, usually black text on white paper; tables or charts to illustrate research components; advertising is at a minimum and is subject-related.	Often printed on glossy paper with colored text or headlines; usually has accompanying photographs and many advertisements.
Publication Acceptance	Experts (peers) in the field review each article submission before publication acceptance (i.e. peer reviewed).	Writers are often employed by the magazine or publisher; acceptance is based largely on the topic's consumer appeal; not peer reviewed.
Language	College-level; specialized vocabulary or jargon of the discipline	Non-technical, conversational/simple vocabulary
Article Length	Often lengthy (approximately 10-30 pages)	Often short (approximately 1-10 pages)
Article Organization & References	Highly-structured; include abstracts, review of literature, methodology, and citations to sources; **always** contain a bibliography of references.	Loosely-structured; **rarely** have bibliographies; sometimes informally mention sources
Examples	*American Journal of Political Science, Policy Studies Review*	*Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Time*

Primary vs. Secondary Sources
These are the two main types of resources used in research.

	Primary Source	Secondary Source
Definition	An original, first-hand document; it has not been previously published, interpreted or translated.	Interprets and analyzes primary sources, information is "once-removed." Secondary sources are often based on primary sources.
Examples	• Original published research • Government documents • Historical records • Works of art and literature (poetry, drama, novels, music, art, etc.) • Correspondence, diaries and other personal papers • Autobiographies • Transcripts of interviews and proceedings • Photographs	• Reviews of the literature of a certain field • Textbooks, encyclopedias, etc. • Reviews of plays, films, books, etc. • Editorials in newspapers/magazines

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Evaluation Criteria for Internet Resources:

The following questions will assist you in judging web sites.

Questions to ask yourself

Authority	• Is the author and the author's affiliation clearly indicated? • Is there contact information for the author? • Is the publisher (or publishing source) reputable?
Accuracy	• Do editors check the information? • Is appropriate documentation provided when the author refers to another's work? • Is the page error-free?
Objectivity	• Is the purpose of the site clearly stated? • Does the author make use of emotional appeals instead of logical arguments as a means to sway the opinion of the audience? • Is sponsorship acknowledged?
Currency	• Is the publication date (date created) clearly stated? • Is the page revised regularly, with the date posted? • Are all links active?
Coverage	• What is the purpose of the page? Is the scope clearly stated? • To what depth does this page purport to delve into the topic? Does it claim to be what it is not? • Who is the audience for the page? Experts or novices?

Quick Guide to Domain Definitions

Evaluating the domain name in the address of an Internet site can help you determine the purpose of the site and its impact on the information provided there.

Questions to ask yourself

.com = commercial	The commercial domain name has recently been expanded to indicate different types of business—for example .biz **Profit** is the primary driving force behind the interests of the organization.
.edu = educational	The educational domain is for organizations connected to education in some way, such as elementary and high schools, colleges and universities, research institutes and museums.
.gov = governmental	The governmental domain is used by US non-military government organizations, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation
.mil = military	The military domain is for US military-related governmental organizations, such as the US Navy.
.org = organization	The organization domain is for non-profit organizations that do not fit the above categories. Advocacy of a particular issue or viewpoint is often the primary purpose of pages from organizations.
.net = network	The network domain is for personal pages.
State sites Example: ia.us	These domains are used for many state governmental sites and some state-affiliated institutions (e.g., schools, libraries). Note: the .US domain requires a state code as a second level domain
Country abbreviations Example: .nz=New Zealand	Country domains are assigned for countries other than the US (Note: The abbreviation is taken from the country's native language; for example, Germany's abbreviation is ".de"
/~	Although this is not a domain name, it is an indication of an account under a domain name. For example, web pages of students at educational institutions are indicated by the school's address followed by a tilde and the student's name.

* Additional domain names have recently been created; for example, **.name** is for individual use—an individual can purchase a domain name ending in a name of their choice.

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Comparison of Database and Web Searching

	Database	Web
Access	Available through the Internet in a Web interface	Available through the Internet in a Web interface
Standards	Yes. Contents are selectively added from newspapers, journals, reference works or library catalog records. Some have only peer-reviewed articles. Errors and bias may still be found, so evaluation is required.	No. Anyone can publish anything and mount it on the web. Requires careful evaluation skills looking at authority, accuracy, currency, objectivity, and coverage.
Format	May have citations only, or citations with abstract, or citations plus full-text	Usually has full-text
Indexing	Indexing follows specific rules for each field.	Indexing varies depending on the spider and what it is programmed to collect (e.g. title, first heading, first 25 words, etc.)
Field Searching	Can restrict searches to a particular field such as Author, Title, Descriptor, Subject, Source (Journal Name)	Some search engines allow limiting searches to a limited number of fields such as Title, URL, Text or Links. This is usually in an "Advanced Search".
Boolean	Generally allows Boolean searching (AND, OR, NOT)	Search engines vary whether and how they allow Boolean searching (+, AND, -, NOT, OR). Default varies between AND and OR.
Proximity	Often has proximity searching (ability to search one word NEAR another or WITHIN "n" words of another)	Few search engines offer proximity searches except Altavista
Cost	Generally expensive to subscribe.	"Free"
Examples	ACS Journals on the Web, EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier, General Science Abstracts	Google, Ixquick, Teoma, Altavista, Vivisimo

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