

SELECTING ARTICLES



How do you know you have the best information available? Look for these qualities:

- ◊ It's highly informative
- ◊ It's highly reliable/credible.
- ◊ It's highly persuasive.
- ◊ It's current enough to be relevant to your topic.

INFORMATIVE

Informative articles teach readers important facts about an issue. Put yourself in the shoes of someone who know little or nothing about this issue. What will readers learn this particular source? How about someone who already knows something about the issue—what might those readers know that they might not have known before? Will readers come away being well-informed after reading this article?

- ◊ Note the amount of fact vs. the amount of “spin” (spin=unsupported opinion)
- ◊ Is there information that might become compelling evidence?

RELIABLE/CREDIBLE

Reliable information is information that has a high degree of credibility. Credibility can stem from a variety of reasons: the information may be well documented, factual rather than opinionated, compelling because it presents a reasoned argument with strong evidence. If there are opinions they are expressed by acknowledged experts in the field whose credentials are trustworthy. Information is often considered credible, too, based on where it is published. Is the publisher, whether that be a newspaper, website, book publisher, or magazine publisher a respected source of information? What motives might the publisher have other than “truth”? (Is there a profit motive, or political bias, or some other barrier to objectivity that you can identify?)

- ◊ Note the credentials of the author and/or the publisher.
- ◊ Note whether the experts or authorities in the field are the ones expressing opinions, and whether or not they have reputable credentials.
- ◊ Note whether the writer's tone and language is fair, balanced, and “coolheaded” rather than hot-tempered, irrational, overly emotional, or one-sided.

PERSUASIVE

A persuasive article is one that makes a convincing claim. Readers may have disagreed with the writer going in, but find they agree on the way out. The claim is so well supported by logical reasoning and evidence and the counterarguments are so effectively refuted that there's no choice but to agree with the writer's claim.

- ◊ Does the writer state the claim clearly? (Evaluate the quality of the claim. Is it arguable, or has the writer set up a “straw man”—claiming something no one actually disagrees with in the first place?)
- ◊ Is the claim supported by logical reasoning and evidence? (Evaluate the validity of the reasoning, and the quality of the evidence—if there is any).
- ◊ Does the article acknowledge opposing views and convincingly refute them by more than mere contradiction?

CURRENT

The most current information carries the strongest weight in an argument. Depending on your topic, information may get old after one year, two years, five years, or twenty-five years. You have to use your judgment. Ask:

- ◊ What would make this information outdated? Who might see it as outdated and why?
- ◊ Has there been newer information available since the date of publication, and how might that newer information affect conclusions drawn here?

Types of Sources: Advantages/Disadvantages

Newspapers: (+) current, easy to read; (-) sensationalized; biased; incomplete picture; unauthoritative

Magazines: (+) more depth than newspapers, easy to read; (-) sensationalized; biased; incomplete picture; unauthoritative

Journals: (+) tend to be more in depth and more objective; usually authors are experts or authorities; (-) can be more difficult to read

Scholarly sources: (+) peer review insures depth, accuracy, credibility, and reliability of information; authors tend to be experts or authorities; (-) vocabulary can be challenging; articles can be very lengthy and difficult to read

Books: (+) depending on the publisher, they provide solid research and depth; authoritative authors; (-) might not be as current as periodical articles

Websites: (+) super-easy access; huge variety; (-) often web sites have a political bias and may intentionally slant information; sometimes the writers may lack credibility or authority; the materials may be poorly organized, incomplete, or sensationalized.