UNB LIBRARIES

EVALUATING INFORMATION

When conducting library & information research, you will probably find a lot of information—perhaps lists of hundreds of publications. How can you choose the best? Here are some basic things to consider:

- **Authors' qualifications** (Are they affiliated with a university or research organization?)
- **Publisher** (Is it a university press, for example? Or another widely-respected research or scientific publisher?)
- **Publication date** (Do you require the latest information, or a classic or standard text?)
- **Length** (Is the publication too brief? Too specific or detailed?)
- **References** (Are there any? Most research publications list their sources.)
- **Subject/content details** (Are there any? There may be astracts, subject headings, descriptors, or tables of contents.)
- **Peer review** (Unlike popular sources, scholarly journals use this rigorous publication process—see below.)

Also consider how the sources you find compare with the general body of academic literature in the subject area. It is usually best to **research broadly** to ensure you find a range of perspectives which represent all scientific or academic thinking on your topic.

Along with academic **books**, scholarly journals are especially important information sources. Scholarly journals are not like **magazines**, **news sources**, or **popular websites**. Sometimes magazines, news sources, and websites report on research that has been published in scholarly journals, but popular articles themselves are not normally the best sources of information. They usually have no peer-review process, and therefore provide little guarantee of reliability.

How can you tell the difference between scholarly and popular sources? To begin with, scholarly journal titles often contain words such as *journal, bulletin, review*, and *quarterly*. But there are several more differences:

SCHOLARLY JOURNALS

Articles in **scholarly journals** are important sources of current expert information, since they contain the results of recent academic research. In addition, over time their publication has a cumulative effect—scholarly journals are largely responsible for building each academic discipline's body of recorded knowledge, or **"literature"**.

Scholarly journals are also called "academic", "research", "peer-reviewed", "refereed", "juried", or simply "journals". Journal articles are usually **peer-reviewed**, meaning they have been evaluated and edited by the author's international professional "peers," a group of subject experts who are usually professors or other academic or scientific researchers in the subject area.

Peer review helps to ensure reliabilty, but the process is not perfect, and **some questionable research still gets published**. Also beware of an article manuscript that has been sent for review, but is not yet published. It may be rejected later by the reviewers and the journal editor.

Criteria	*Scholarly Journals*	*Magazines, Newspapers, and Websites*
Purpose:	report independent research findings	provide information at a profit; sell ads
Audience:	scholars, researchers, professionals	general public
Author:	from research organizations (often PhDs)	often no credentials necessary
Tone:	formal, scientific, technical	informal
Validation:	references or citations	often no references provided
Layout:	often long articles	shorter, many illustrations
Availability:	academic libraries, internet	bookstores, newsstands, internet
Examples:	*Philosophical Review (Duke University Press)*	*Maclean's*, NYTimes.com, Wikipedia

Note that there are **significantly varying levels of quality** amongst peer-reviewed journals. Peer-review does not always guarantee reliable information. Also note that science and scholarship are evolving processes of communication amongst researchers. **Conclusions are routinely challenged and refuted.** Therefore, **review articles**, or **books** or book **chapters**, which provide an overview of many studies, are especially useful.

Following the above pre-evaluation of an article, book, or other source (a process that only takes seconds, once you have become adept at it), you will need to **READ** it much more closely—evaluating the authors' **logic**, **assumptions**, **research methodology**, **conclusions**, **source data**, and other aspects of the publication.