

**Anna**

Part two of the podcast Put your critical hat on. I've been talking about the importance of evaluating information in this podcast. Are there any obvious clues that information is of a good quality?

**Christina**

When you pick up a book from the library you can be relatively confident of its quality. You might want to check who the publisher is whether it's current enough for your purposes as information in books is often less up to date than in other sources. But if you're looking at journal articles via the library databases or from your reading lists, again you can be relatively confident that they are from trusted sources because they'll have been selected by a lecturer or by the publisher's database. But I think you will find, I certainly as a researcher even though I'm a librarian, did go out on the web and I think the difficulty when you're doing that is you have to really consider what it is that you found.

So when I find something I don't know much about. I look at things like whether there's a bibliography or a list of references. I'd probably look at who the author is and check whether they're affiliated to a university or some other professional body. That's a good one because I think you do need to work out whether they are somebody who you would want to read and know who they might be. But also I think you need to find out whether you can actually see where it's come from such as an article from a journal - which journal it's from and the full details of when it was published.

And if it's a chapter in a book the same thing. So there are lots of things that sit on the web out of context and you do need to know that context to find out whether they are something you can use or not. If only for the simple reason you've got to reference it at the end of the day when you use it in your work.

**Anna**

Yeah. Are there any particular sources that students should be looking to use for their research or is there anything you think they should be avoiding.

**Christina**

Good question. To a large extent it does depend on the assignment brief. If you've been told to look for scholarly resources then don't use articles from general interest magazines you might find on the high street or popular websites that come off on a Google search. These can be a great source of information, for example if you're looking at how a certain phenomenon is represented in popular culture or for background reading but they don't usually take an academic stance on the subject. So if you want to find a scholarly source then look for something that is peer reviewed.

So that means the articles been reviewed by others working in the same field to make sure it makes sense and is of good quality. Actually it's quite easy to find peer reviewed sources because we've got something on the library search. You can just tick a box and then what comes up will all be peer reviewed stuff.

**Anna**

So here, you know where you stand and that's often a question we get asked by students is what are peer reviewed articles and how do you access them.

**Christina**

Yes absolutely. And I mean if you're looking in our journals collection it's often easy to tell the difference between more academic journals and popular magazines. The photos give it away. Yeah the photos and a lot of advertisements in the popular magazines whereas you'll find some extra features in the academic journals as well as, you might have abstracts which are summaries of the article at the start and the list of references which you were talking about before.

**Anna**

So it's really important as students get in and have a look at the journals and get a feel for what are the differences.

**Christina**

But it's quite good to actually look at them in person and then you've got an idea of what they are for you see online. Sorry yes. If you can but if you can't then have a look at some examples online and you should get a similar idea.

**Anna**

Yeah. Is there anything else you think a student should avoid?

**Christina**

I suppose one thing that comes up for me is students often fixate on other students' dissertation that are answering the exact same question that they're asking. But I think you have to be careful because you have to remember that another student is not going to know any more than you on the subject and also you don't want to steal their ideas. You want to develop your own ideas. So by all means look at their bibliography and see if you want to find any more sources to investigate. But do try to find your own perspective from reading around a range of sources.

The other thing to avoid maybe is reviews because they kind of look like they're going to tell you everything on the subject but actually they're talking about someone else's books. So the best thing to do then is try and get hold of the book that they're talking about. And remember if we don't have a book in the library we can always request it for you from another library.

**Anna**

Are there any memorable examples or cases of students using poor sources that you can recall?

**Christina**

I haven't seen a lot but I think the worst things I have seen is students trying to get us to buy made up books they found on Amazon that are just made out of old Wikipedia articles. I'm not even sure why they're on sale but I have seen a few of them and they're really not worth having. Also occasionally if a

student's looking for that specific thing that's really going to help them with their essay, they might find something that's a bit old and out of date and fixate on it because it seems to be the only sources on a subject. Particularly when students are doing dissertations.

**Anna**

I think that happens a lot but I think also you do need to think about how reliable your sources are because it's not going to impact you just as a student but also when it comes to evaluating information. As a professional or in your personal life.

**Christina**

Yeah I think you've got an interesting example of that.

**Anna**

Well yeah I recently came across a news story about a sculptor in Russia who had been commissioned to create a statue of a famous Russian architect and he failed to check his sources properly.

And unfortunately having used a Wikipedia entry as his reference he created a bronze statue of the wrong person and it sat in a square in St. Petersburg for seven years before anybody realized that it was actually a statue of a Scottish professor. It was a very similar name. So that was a very sort of high profile embarrassing mistake which I think is a lesson to us all. Quite unbelievable. The perils of using Wikipedia. We must say you can use it when you're doing your initial exploratory research.

**Christina**

Absolutely.

**Anna**

What would be your sort of top tips for evaluating sources to give to new student.

**Christina**

Okay. Well I suppose the most important thing is just to think critically about them. Take a moment to check what they are and where they come from before you decide whether you want to use them. One framework that's quite commonly used is called the CRAAP test.

So that's an acronym standing for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose. I believe we do have some more information on that on the Study Hub website.

But really it just boils down to thinking about where your source is from, how up to date it is, what's the purpose or motivation for creating it, and the reliability of the evidence underpinning it. So yeah, just be sensible when you're using the web for your research. Google or Wikipedia is fine for some initial searches to scope out your research topic. To get a feel for the topic or identify key ideas and theories but it's not the be all and end all. I mean the other thing on the web I guess is Google Scholar can be quite

useful. It's good for some subjects and not others, its pretty good for sciences and some of the media ones and you can connect your Google account to the Falmouth library so you link to our resources.

**Anna**

I think the students are often unaware of that. So yeah really good.

**Christina**

Absolutely. But I guess when it comes to sources, your academic writing is important. Think about the origins of published current, particularly with books as we said earlier they do go out of date very quickly, and the relevance to your research.

So I think the other thing is if you're using the library resources then you are going to have a sort of element of quality assurance there. If it's been purchased by the library it's been chosen by a lecturer as being relevant to your studies or chosen for some other academic purpose.

**Anna**

And before we finish, I'm asking all our interviewees just for interest really what is your favourite part of the library.

**Christina**

Tricky for so many you know. Yes I do have some favourite special collections. I mean the Bill Douglas and Peter Jewel collection which has all these amazing books about classic films and early TV annuals and so forth. Which is really fun to look at. I guess as a comics fan maybe my favourite is going to have to be the illustrated books collection at Falmouth campus as there's loads of graphic novels you can borrow there. And just so online students don't feel left out, you do have some great digitized archival resources - the Vogue Archive, National Geographic search.

**Anna**

Is there anything else you'd like to share with students that are just starting out?

**Christina**

Well I guess use your reading list and the readings your lecturers recommend and then branch out from there.

**Anna**

Thanks very much Christina.

So we've talked a bit about evaluating information for your assignment research, but remember its increasingly important in your personal life too in order to make sense of the world and be a responsible citizen. As citizens increasingly immersed in social media we often don't take the time to think about information we share.

Some recent BBC research 'Beyond Fake News' in 2018 has shown that commonly used criteria for evaluating information on social media include: the number of comments on a post, the kinds of images in the post, but also the sender's identity with the assumption that messages from family and friends could be trusted and sent on without checking. So it's easy to see how misinformation can spread unchecked virally. There have been increasing instances of violence against individuals who have had false information spread about them on social media platforms so think before you share a story.

But it's also worth reminding you to take care of your personal data. We often make quick and careless judgments when deciding on what information to share about ourselves whether that's posting something on Facebook or agreeing to cookies for a Web site. We talked a little bit about data harvesting at the start of the podcast and data is collected about us at a phenomenal rate every time we log on. If you want to get a feel for the scale of this issue I'd recommend having a look at Dylan Curran's blog and Twitter threads to see how much data can be collected about one person.

I was truly alarmed at the data that is collected about us and I am much more careful about what I say yes to now. Thinking about your online presence and digital footprints could also become really important for your employability later on as employers increasingly do check out your web presence. To bring this podcast to a close the main point is that we often make incredibly quick judgments about the information we use and that we share and it's really important to break out of these habits particularly when you're searching for and using information for scholarly or professional purposes.

A key point is to try to slow down when engaging with information and make sure you have your critical hats on especially when the information is particularly important. Whether as a student or a citizen or as a professional. The truth is that all our data and information will become increasingly more important as more of life becomes digital and the information we create and generate becomes a critical part of our identity and our value.