

Critical Evaluation of Resources Researcher Guide

Use this guide if you are:

- A researcher doing post graduate research at Bournemouth University.

This guide is in two parts. The first part **Authority** lists practical checks that you might consider in establishing the authority or credibility of material. The second part **Suitability** summarises briefly points you should consider in assessing the suitability or appropriateness of material to your research.

Bournemouth University Library provides an extensive collection of print and online resources on many subjects in two locations: The Sir Michael Cobham Library at Talbot Campus and the Bournemouth House Library (BH) on the Lansdowne Campus.

Searching for Information

The best place to start your search is through the library tab on [myBU](#). Here you can:

- Use **mySearch**, the library resources search engine, to search across all of our electronic resources and the library catalogue.
- Search resources not yet added to mySearch and find out about any password access required
- Find help on how to search for information by clicking on the Infoskills online tutorial.

Subject Advice services

Subject Librarians are available to offer advice on information resources for assignments, dissertations or research.

If you need further help finding the information you require on this topic, please use one or more of the Library's Subject Advice services:

- Ask for help at the Subject Advice Point.
- If you need more advice, make an appointment to see your Subject Librarian or any other colleague in the support team. Staff at any of the information points will help you to arrange this
- When staff are not available, send your enquiry to ASK, the online enquiry service, which you can find by going to the Library tab on [myBU](#) or the Library website. Your question will be answered from our database and if you require more help we will reply by e-mail with advice and, where possible, specific recommendations as to possible sources.

Authority

Author

Authorship is an indicator of credibility especially where publications have not been through a rigorous process of peer review.

Affiliation - check the author's home institution. Are they part of a department or faculty that has a track record of scholarship in the area? Is the institution of good standing?

Biography - search for the authors name on Google to find a curriculum vitae [CV], biography or bibliography of published works. Do they have a credible record of scholarly activity? Is it an area where they are actively researching or teaching?

Publications by the same author - using a database to search for articles and books by the same author. Have they published before? Do they have other publications in the same area?

Publishers

In any academic community some publishers will be regarded more highly than others. This information is not available in league tables. Rather it is informal knowledge that resides in any community of scholars who regularly publish or contribute to the UK Research Assessment Exercise [RAE] where the standing of a publisher might reflect upon the perceived value of a publication. The following points are a guide.

Publishers – are they associated with a leading university or scholarly organisation? Do they publish extensively in the area? Do they have a track record in scholarly publishing?

Publishers as Author – in some cases the publisher is also author, usually in the case of a publication by an organisation or corporation. Where the publisher is the author you can make an assessment of the credibility of the publisher? What is their relationship to the material?

Critical Reviews

Critically reviewing of new work is a routine activity for scholars. Books reviews are a typical feature of scholarly journals. Citation Searching is an indication of the standing of an individual publication and for older works reference sources will provide an assessment of the significance of a publication or author.

Book Reviews – reviews in scholarly journals aim to place books in context, relate it to other works in the area and give an indication of its value to scholarship. Reviews of the same book in different scholarly journals provide an opportunity for comparison.

Citation Searching – checking how many times a publication is cited by others using the *ISI Citation Indexes* gives some indication of the value of a publication to others. Generally citation counts are less than ten; high counts are a strong indication of a publications significance.

Biographical Guides, Scholarly Encyclopedias and Dictionaries – critically review older significant works, set them in context and assess their contribution to the knowledge of the subject.

Journals

Scholarly journals are the main published source of original research. As with publishers (above) some titles have a higher standing in than others. While the process of **Peer Review** provides a base line for quality and reliability there are additional checks you can make to establish the standing of any title.

What is Peer Review? - articles are reviewed by scholarly experts or 'peers' before publication. Articles are either rejected or accepted with suggestions for improvement. Peer review seeks to:

- enforce standards of quality and style;
- ensure conformity with accepted paradigms;
- guard against fraudulent research claims.

Peer reviewed journals define the scholarship in an area of academic activity.

Peer Review – articles in peer review journals should achieve the standards set out by the journal. Knowing that a journal is peer reviewed should provide reassurance of the quality of the contents. You can check the Bournemouth University Subject Guides or search Ulrich's, an International Periodicals Directory which lists peer reviewed journals. The following checklist also provides pointers to identifying scholarly content.

Characteristics of scholarly journals	Characteristics of trade and professional journals
Long articles that report the results of research.	Short articles, which report news and current events.
Articles have a set structure usually containing: i) an abstract; ii) literature review; iii) justification of research; iv) methodology; v) results; vi) conclusions and suggestions for further research.	Articles have no shared structure. They are frequently of different lengths, style and content within one issue.
Journals have a system of referencing or referring to other publications mentioned in the text. The Harvard System (name - date) is an example.	Articles do not use a systematic form to refer to other peoples publications or words (quotations).
Published monthly or quarterly.	Frequently published, usually weekly.
Have extensive bibliographies.	Articles do not have bibliographies.
Authors are identified, usually giving their place of employment such as a university or research institute.	Authors are not identified.
Authors are academics or researchers.	Authors are professional journalists.
Articles are reviewed by referees to ensure quality. This process is called peer review. Journals that use this process are called <i>Peer Reviewed Journals</i> or <i>Refereed Journals</i> .	The decision to publish is the editors alone.

Journal Titles – within any scholarly community some journals are more highly rated than others. The *ISI Journal Citation Reports* provides measures that indicate the importance of journals titles, the *Impact Factor* and *Immediacy Index*.

Editorial Standing – interdisciplinary areas and newly emerging areas of scholarship are not be included in the *ISI Journal Citation Reports* which focus on established titles in defined disciplinary areas. Checking the editorial panel, usually listed in the front of the journal or on the journal's website, is an indication of the importance of a journal. Does the panel have an international scope? Are 'known' scholars included? Are key universities, research groups or departments represented in the panel members?

Contact Details

Bournemouth House Library

19 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 3LH UK
Library renewals, information and subject advice:
Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965959.

The Sir Michael Cobham Library

Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, Poole, BH12 5BB, UK
Library renewals, information and subject advice:
Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965959.

Also at The Sir Michael Cobham Library:

Additional Learning Needs Service: Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965663
Learning Support Reception Desk: Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965663
Language Centre Advice: Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965300
IT Service Desk: Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965515

AS Information Line (24hr)

Tel: +44 (0) 1202 965959
Press 0 for enquiries
Press 5 for library renewals

E-Journals – journals published in electronic form, usually published by higher education institutions independently of established publishers. As a publishing medium their reputation suffered because they did not in many cases have an explicit process of rigorous peer review. There are notable exceptions, however, but the 'standing' of e-journals should be carefully reviewed.

Websites

Concern about the content of the web for research and scholarly activity derives from websites where the *authorship of content is unknown*, where the *credibility of the source is uncertain* or where the *reliability of content cannot be verified*. Checks on the authority of the source outlined above should be applied to websites. Using resources that specialise in scholarly content can act as a filter, however, a critical evaluation is necessary.

INTUTE – resource for higher education including only quality checked websites.

Google Scholar (beta) – searches scholarly content on the web. Additionally Google Scholar provides a citation search where sources have been cited in other publications.

Windows Live (beta) – searches the web but offers an 'academic' filter.

Suitability

Scope - What is the breadth of the article, book, website or other material? Is it a general work that provides an overview of the topic or is it specifically focused on only one aspect of your topic. Does the breadth of the work match your own expectations? Does the resource cover the right time period that you are interested in?

Audience - Who is the intended audience for this source? Is the material too technical? Is it too elementary or basic? Is it directed at an academic audience? Does it report the results of original scholarship or research?

Timeliness - When was the source published? If it is a website, when was it last updated? Avoid using undated websites. Library catalogues and periodical databases always indicate the publication date in the bibliographic citation.

Publication Cycle – Where a publication appears in the publication cycle is an indicator of its intention and purpose. Broadly, conference proceedings report new 'raw' research. Scholarly handbooks, readers and annual reviews summarise research in specific areas. Scholarly encyclopaedias summarise research across disciplines, providing a 'helicopter view'.

Resources

Bournemouth University Subject Guides list specific subject resources, the following resources have a broad coverage of all discipline areas.

COPAC – via [myBU](#) Library tab
Google Scholar (beta) [<http://scholar.google.com>]
INTUTE - via [myBU](#) Library tab
ISI Citation Indexes - via [myBU](#) Library tab
Subject Guides - via [myBU](#) Library tab
Research Assessment Exercise [RAE] - <http://www.hero.ac.uk/rae/>]
Ulrich's - via [myBU](#) Library tab
Windows Live (beta) – [<http://www.live.com/>]

Guides

A number of guides are available on the web. The following guides are good examples:

Barker, J., 2006. *Critical Evaluation of Resources* [online]. Berkeley CA : University of California. Available from: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Evaluaton.html> [Accessed: 24 August 2006].

Cameron, S. 2001. *Evaluating Internet Sites for Academic Use: Briefing Paper 2, a checklist for students (and teachers)* [online]. LTSN. Available from: http://hca.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/Briefing_Papers/bp2.php [Accessed: 24 August 2006].

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