

Making good decisions: **PROMPT**

The PROMPT approach to evaluating information is a simple guide to checking that your information is 'good'. Formulated by the Open University, PROMPT stands for:

Presentation - is the information clear and readable?

Relevance - is the information relevant to the purpose?

Objectivity - is the content balanced or is there some bias?

Method - how was the information gathered together?

Provenance - who or what organisation wrote the information and are they a reliable source?

Timeliness - is the information up-to-date and does it matter in the context?

'Good' Information and 'Bad' Information

To evaluate the information you have found in your search, it is advised that you think about the characteristics of the information, as this will help indicate whether it's 'good' information or 'bad' information. Examples of good and bad information are shown below.

	'Good' information	'Bad' information
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is readable ▪ Is well written ▪ Is clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is messy ▪ Is difficult to understand ▪ Has spelling and grammatical errors
Relevance	Covers a similar subject to your search question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is too detailed ▪ Is too general ▪ Relates to a country or region outside the scope of information need
Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presents a balanced view ▪ Acknowledges other 'sides' to argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presents a biased view ▪ Expresses opinions as if they were facts
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses an appropriate communication medium ▪ Uses a representative sample size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses a method that is poorly designed ▪ Uses a very small sample and generalises finding to the wider population
Provenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comes from a professional journal ▪ Is published by a well known voluntary organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No author information ▪ Is produced by a company with a vested interest in the research
Timeliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is of a time relevant to your need ▪ Is the most up-to-date information available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No publication date ▪ Has been superseded by new research

Scenario

You are the manager of a residential care home and are reviewing the way residents are cared for at night. You want to find some guidance on night-time care to meet the needs of your staff and residents. You find a report on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation website (www.jrf.org.uk) called Supporting older people in care homes at night (Kerr et al., 2008).

You evaluate it and note that:

1. The report comes from a reliable source - Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a charity with a history of research output relating to social care and social policy. The site has a useful 'About Us' page and a publications area so you can see what else they have produced.
2. The report was written in April 2008 so you know it is up to date.
3. The study included three care homes so its findings are not based on just one home.
4. Research findings are clearly summarised but there is also a detailed account of the study and the project, including contact information for further information.
5. The report provides clearly explained recommendations for staff, relatives and residents.

Based on your evaluation, you conclude that the information you have found is reliable and you are comfortable using it in planning the changes you want to make to your service.

Evaluating websites

It is important to remember that anyone can set up a website, and not all of the information you find on the world wide web will be credible or reliable.

Below is some criteria for evaluating websites:

Authority

Who is responsible for the website? What are their qualifications and associations, and can you verify them?

It is good advice to check the footer for the name of the web page author or organisation. Also check the end of the URL (web address) domain name, as it will tell you more about the organisation that created the website.

.edu (educational institution)
.com (commercial or business)
.gov (government body)
.org (not-for-profit organisation)
.ac.uk (academic institution)

Currency

Are dates clear when the website was first created and edited?

Coverage

What is the focus of the site? Are there clear headings to illustrate an outline of the content? Is the navigation within the website clear?

Objectivity

Are biases clearly stated? Are affiliations clear? ie the relationship between the source and any other companies or organisations clearly stated.

Accuracy

Are sources of information and factual data listed, and available for cross-checking? Is the content accurate in terms of spelling, grammar and facts, as well as consistent throughout website?



Think of a topic/issue which is important to your work and carry out a search for information as you did in Steps 1 and 2. Then pick one of the websites listed in the search engine and, using the PROMPT heading from page 1 and the criteria on the left, make some notes of you evaluation of the credibility of the website you've chosen.