Evaluating Books

Not all books are created equal. Some entertain, some argue, some inform. Some might do all three. It’s your job as a researcher to learn how to recognize which of these categories a book falls into and whether or not it meets your research needs. These are the things you need to consider when evaluating books:

1. Authority
   - Who are the authors or editors? Are they experts in the subject matter of the book?
   - Who is the publisher? Was the book published by a commercial, specialty, vanity or university press?

2. Accuracy
   - Is the information correct and accurate? Can the facts be verified?
   - Does the book contain footnotes and/or a bibliography? Are sources properly cited?

3. Objectivity
   - What is the purpose of the book: to inform, persuade or entertain?
   - Is the book based on fact or opinion?

4. Currency
   - When was the book published?
   - Is the information up to date or is the information timeless?

5. Coverage
   - Who is the intended audience: the general public, students or scholars?
   - Does the book contain information relevant to your subject?
   - Does the book provide comprehensive coverage of the subject matter?

Evaluation Tips

Consult **book reviews** to learn more about the author(s) and the quality of the book.

Look for an **author biography** on the jacket or within the book to determine their credentials and affiliations.

Scan the **table of contents** and **index** to find out what is covered in the book.

Read the **preface** and **introduction** to determine the purpose of the book.

Check the **publication date** to determine the currency of the book.
Comparing Books

If you were required to write a paper on particle physics, which of these three books would be your best source of information? View the comparison chart and decide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>The Physics of Star Trek</th>
<th>Quantum Physics for Dummies</th>
<th>Particle Astrophysics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author credentials</td>
<td>Ph.D. in physics</td>
<td>Ph.D. in physics</td>
<td>Ph.D. in physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>HarperCollins</td>
<td>For Dummies</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>to entertain and inform</td>
<td>to inform</td>
<td>to educate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>general</td>
<td>general, beginning student</td>
<td>university students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>