### Evaluating information sources, including books, journal articles and websites

**Remember the 4 “R”s**

| **RECENT** | **Who wrote the book, article or website?** (Websites will often include this information under the “About Us” link)  
|           | • Are they an expert in the subject?  
|           | • Are they associated with an institution or organisation in a relevant field?  
|           | • Do they list their qualifications? Do they provide contact details?  
|           | • Look at the URL or address of a website. Is an educational, governmental, organisational or commercial website? Domain Categories: .edu (academic institution) .gov (government body) .com or .co (commercial body) .org (non-profit organizations)  
|           | **Is the information biased in any way?**  
|           | • Is it written or sponsored by someone with a vested interest such as a pharmaceutical company, a land developer or a tobacco company?  
|           | **Can the information be verified?**  
|           | • Is there a bibliography or reference list showing the books and journal articles used by the author? (websites should have links to sources of information, or list the references used).  
|           | **Who has published the information?**  
|           | • For books you can look at the publisher. Most scholarly books are published by either a university press, well respected commercial publisher, governments, professional bodies or research institutions  
|           | **Is the article from a scholarly journal?**  
|           | • Journals can be either scholarly or popular. Generally you would use scholarly journals for your assignments. See over for a comparison of these journals.  
| **RELIABLE** | **READABLE**  
| Can you easily read and understand the information?  
| Who is the target audience? Is it the general public, university students, or researchers and professionals in the field?  
| Is the information too basic, or is it too technical for you to understand?  
| **RELEVANT** | **Is the information relevant to your topic?**  
| Does it give an overview of the topic or go into the details of a particular aspect?  
| Does the information support or refute an argument?  
| When was the book or journal article published?  
| When was the website last updated?  
| **When was the book or journal article published?**  
| **When was the website last updated?** |
## Popular vs. Scholarly journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Popular journals</th>
<th>Scholarly journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance</strong></td>
<td>Usually colourful, with articles that have illustrations and photographs.</td>
<td>Articles generally contain fewer photos, but often contain include technical diagrams, graphs, charts etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>To entertain and inform the general public.</td>
<td>To present or report on research in a particular area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td>Articles tend to be shorter, and present an overview of a topic rather than going into detail. As a result popular journal articles may be useful as introductory background reading on a subject.</td>
<td>Articles are longer and provide an in-depth look at a particular aspect of a topic. There is often an abstract (or summary) of the article at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Generally language is non-technical and doesn’t assume prior knowledge of the subject.</td>
<td>Often includes specialist or technical language, assuming some prior subject knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>The authors are often journalists with little specialist knowledge of the subject. There is usually no reference to the author’s credentials.</td>
<td>Authors are usually experts in the subject area. They are often associated with an institution or organisation in a relevant field? The author’s credentials are listed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td>Usually based on background reading and interviews rather than original research.</td>
<td>Presents or reports on original research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>Sources of information are not cited.</td>
<td>Sources of information are cited in a reference list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer reviewed?</strong></td>
<td>Popular journal articles are not peer reviewed.</td>
<td>Articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals are reviewed before publication by the author’s peers. (i.e. other experts in the same subject field).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: