

MODULE 6 – ASSESSING RELEVANT RESOURCES

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Evidence is often defined as proof supporting a claim or belief. Evidence is determined by a number of factors. These include the quality of the evidence, which is determined from the vigor of the study design, study of applicability, the generalizability of studies, the statistical significance, bias, attrition, intervention focus, and sustainability of impact. However, in policy-making, evidence may also include the weight of statutory or judicial law, regulatory and administrative codes, historical documents as well as other institutional texts.

So when we look at assessing relevant resources, we need to establish credentials. So before we start, let's take a moment for some advice. Pulling together relevant resources, evaluating them, synthesizing them and preparing a cogent and coherent policy brief takes time. Generally, there's a deadline for the deliverable of the finished work. And you will be evaluated on how credible your resources are, how accurate your statements are, and how compelling your argument is. It sounds like a class assignment. So in addition to the suggestions in Bardach, we suggest the following items to assess the materials you will use in your policy be. And this applies to web pages as well as links on web pages.

Authority. Who wrote it? What are their credentials? A report by the State Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability staff on the child welfare system in Florida carries more weight than a blog by an irate citizen. Some publishers carry more weight than others. And items that have no publishers listed are simply sloppy and perhaps should be eschewed in favor of other works that clearly state who publish them. For websites, consider the domain-- edu, .gov, .com-- also as items to scrutinize.

When we are looking at scope, what is the scope of the resource? Is it a general work that provides an overview of the topic, or is it specifically focused only on one component of your argument or topic? Also, who is the intended audience for this source? If you are writing for policymakers, then find other materials that are oriented towards policymakers. Make sure the language is appropriate and at the level you need. If this is meant to be international in scope, then to be certain, you need to address issues using defined terms and a standard language.

Timeliness. Unless you're presenting an historical paper, then currency is better, especially when you are looking at changing how things are now. A paper addressing issues six years ago has little relevance for today, unless you can show that things have not changed since that first report. That means finding every subsequent report to date to make sure you are not misreporting old data.

Scholarly versus popular works. As noted, expert and evidence generally are grounded in science. So perhaps that paragraph in US News and World Report that doesn't cite the actual study may not be the best source to quote even if that statistic looks really good. And that brings us to documentation. People actually read bibliographies and then go back to checkout references. This is

key when we want to make sure we are accurately reporting information, making claims, and substantiating our arguments.

And since, we, that is Dr. Levin and I can tell when someone has copied someone else's bibliography and not gone to the original source, so can other people. It's like quoting someone from a journal article, and then finding out that the piece you cited was actually the misstated by the author, which you would have known if you had taking time to read the actual article and not used a secondary source.

Objectivity. Remember how we all use institutional voices? Here is where bias appears as we argue using preferred language, constructs , and frames. The same applies to certain newsletters, journals, and even publishers. So beware of subtle and not so subtle advocate positions, which you can identify through the language. The date of publication, if you can't find it, beware. Undated factual or statistical information should not be used if you can find an alternative source.