

Where do I start? – Evaluating information

Why should I evaluate?

Material on your reading lists will have been evaluated by your lecturers for quality. When you are looking for your own information for an essay or project, you will need to do this evaluation. Academic books and journal articles are likely to have been peer reviewed (assessed for quality by experts in that subject area) before publication.

It is particularly important that you evaluate websites as anyone can publish anything on the web and few sites are quality controlled.

What areas should I consider?

Relevance to your topic

- Is the information relevant for your work? What is it mainly about? You can find this out from the contents pages of books, introductions and overviews of books and websites and abstracts of journal articles and conference papers.
- Is it too detailed or not detailed enough. Is it too technical (look at the language used) or too simple?
- Does it cover the right geographic area, time period, aspect of the topic?

Purpose

- What is the authorial intention? Is it a review of the subject area, reporting of results, promoting a particular opinion, selling a particular product etc.
- Who is the intended audience? For example a website may be aimed at the general public rather than an academic audience.

Source and Author

- Is the author well-known in the field? Previous publications, times cited, qualifications and institutional base are all relevant.
- Is the author named, if it is a website, and are contact details given?
- How reliable is the source? Is it a well known publication? Is the journal peer reviewed? If it is a website, you can see from the URL what organisation produced it, e.g. academic (.ac or .edu) or commercial (.co or .com)

Content

- Assess the standard of scholarship. Check the methods used, the results obtained and the conclusions drawn. Are the conclusions drawn supported by evidence?
- Check for bias and objectivity. Does the author or organisation have a vested interest? Is the language used emotive? Does it contradict everything else you have read?

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- Is currency important? When was it produced? Is it obsolete? If it is a website, is the information being maintained or are there dead links?
- Is the paper too detailed or not detailed enough? A highly specific paper may be inappropriate at the start of a literature review.

Evaluation checklists

- You can use the CARS checklist (Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness and Support), developed by the academic publisher McGraw Hill, to evaluate websites:
http://novella.mhhe.com/sites/0079876543/student_view0/research_center-999/research_papers30/conducting_web-based_research.html#summary
- Another useful checklist is PROMPT produced by the Open University:
<http://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/beingdigital/objects/87/index.htm>

Where can I get help with evaluating information?

Evaluating books

You can find book reviews published in journals by searching databases such as Web of Science™ Core Collection and limiting your search to Book Review.

Most broadsheet newspapers in the UK carry book reviews. Use the Nexis database to search all UK newspapers or you can look at the websites of individual newspapers. You can find this database and a guide to using it by searching for it by title on SUPrimo or using the lists of databases at:

<http://guides.lib.strath.ac.uk/az.php>

Evaluating journals – Incites Journal Citation Reports database

Journals are rated for quality. The InCites Journal Citation Reports database lets you evaluate and compare journals using citation data. For example the journal impact factor compares a journal's relative importance to others in the same field. This is done by measuring the frequency with which the average article in a journal has been cited within a particular year. You can find this database by searching for it by title on SUPrimo or using the lists of databases at:

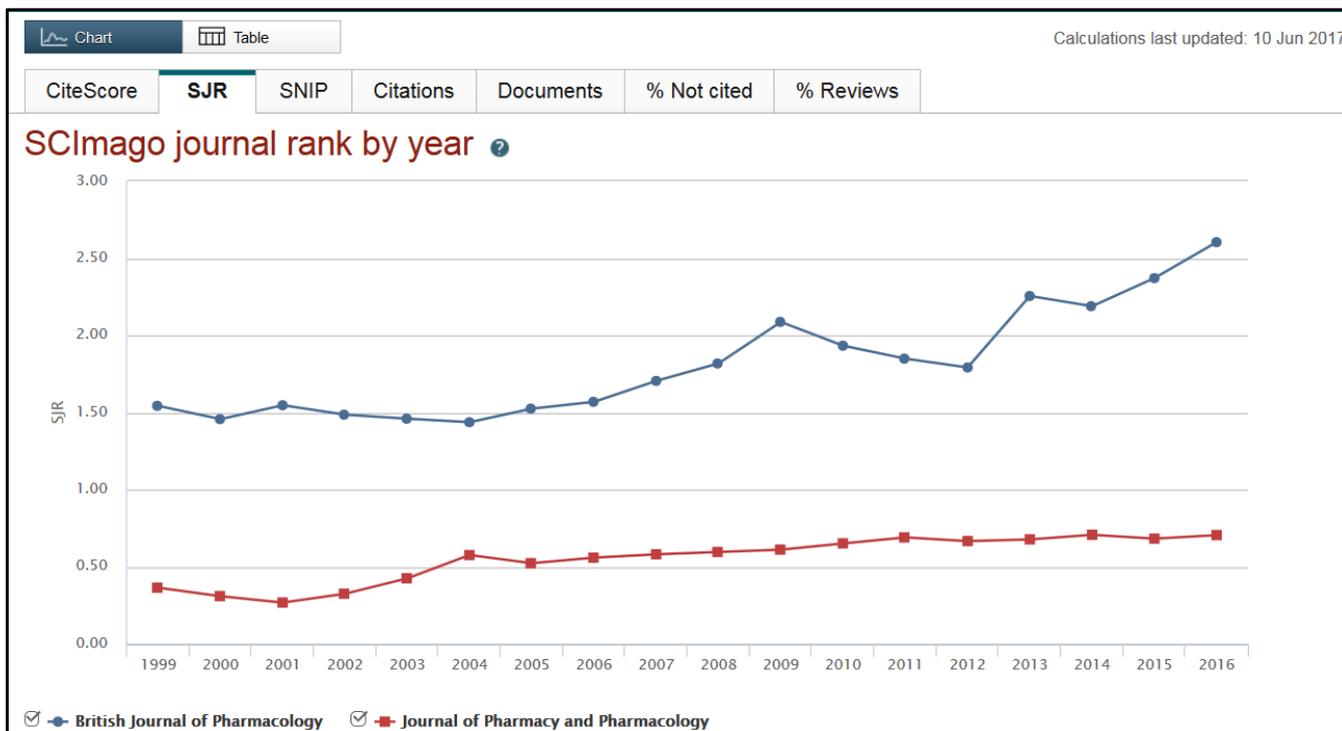
<http://guides.lib.strath.ac.uk/az.php>

The screenshot shows the InCites Journal Citation Reports interface. The main content area displays a table titled 'Journal Titles Ranked by Impact Factor'. The table has the following columns: Full Journal Title, Total Cites, Journal Impact Factor, and Eigenfactor Score. The data is as follows:

	Full Journal Title	Total Cites	Journal Impact Factor	Eigenfactor Score
1	CA-A CANCER JOURNAL FOR CLINICIANS	24,539	187.040	0.06452
2	NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE	315,143	72.406	0.69989
3	NATURE REVIEWS DRUG DISCOVERY	28,750	57.000	0.06077

Evaluating journals – Scopus Compare Sources

Scopus Compare Sources (on the far right of the Documents search window) compares the content and performance of up to ten sources at a time using ranking metrics.



- CiteScore calculates the average number of citations received in a calendar year by all items published in that source in the preceding three years.
- The SJR (SCImago Journal Rank) is weighted by the prestige of a journal, so a citation from a source with a high SJR is worth more.
- SNIP (Source Normalized Impact per Paper) weights citations based on the total number of citations in a subject field so you can compare sources across different fields.
- Citations compares sources by the number of documents published in a year.
- Documents compare sources by the number of documents published in a year.
- % Not Cited compare sources by the percentage of documents published in a year that have never been cited to date.
- % Reviews compare sources by the percent of articles that are review articles.

You can find the Scopus database and a guide to using it by searching for it by title on SUPrimo or using the lists of databases at: <http://guides.lib.strath.ac.uk/az.php>

Evaluating journals – Eigenfactor.org

Eigenfactor.org ranks journals in the natural and social sciences in a similar way to the Google PageRank algorithm: journals are important if they are cited by other important journals. The Article Influence (AI) is similar to JCR Impact Factors and is the average influence of the papers in a journal over the first five years after publication. This is an academic research project sponsored by the West Lab and the Bergstrom Lab at the University of Washington: <http://www.eigenfactor.org/> Eigenfactor scores are also available through Incites Journal Citation Reports.