

## Step 5 Selecting information

During your search you will find all kinds of information. You only want to use relevant and reliable sources of this information. In this step we give you guidelines to assess different sources.

The most important criteria on which you judge publications are:

- Relevance: the extent to which the information contributes to answering the (research) question.
- Reliability: the extent to which you can trust that the information is correct.
- Assessing books on relevance and reliability
- Assessing articles for relevance and reliability
- Assessing websites on relevance and reliability

## Relevance

Relevance is the extent to which the information contributes to answering the research question. This concerns both central question and subquestions. You assess the information and sources of information found on the basis of content, form and currency.

### Content and level of information

- Connection of information to question and purpose
  - Does the information answer your (research) question?
  - Does the information reflect the general picture or does it concern exceptions or specific areas?
  - Are the quality and the level of the information appropriate to your research question and the aim of the research ( If you are researching depression, an article from the Happiness or Forbes will not have the required quality level. Articles from professional journals or even scientific journals are then better suited (see step 3 Sources of information).
- Completeness: Have you not overlooked relevant information and taken into account all selected opinions? Complete completeness is often not possible and is usually not necessary.

### Form of the information

Does the type of information source (book, article, dissertation, etc.) match your information needs?

If you are looking for background information, it might be better to consult a book or a website than to read an in-depth research article.

### Currency

This word is usually used for recent events or developments. To determine whether information is current, check whether the information for a particular year still corresponds to the current situation. Sometimes certain data do not change. An older book or article may still be up to date. Publications that keep their value are called core publications. Usually it is important to find up current information, but not always. A historian will mainly look for old, often outdated information. So it depends on the central question and purpose.

# Reliability

This is about the extent to which you can trust that the information is correct. To what extent is the information credible? To what extent is the information objective? The reliability of information can be assessed on the basis of:

## **Authority of source (author/organisation) and creation of document**

- Is the author an authority? Is he a recognized author in his field? Which organisation does he/she work for? What is known about the author?
- Is it a reputable organisation? Who is the website administrator? A document or website of a respected well-known organisation is generally more reliable than that of a vague foundation with dubious or unclear objectives.
- Is it a case of sponsorship of author or organisation? Sponsorship does not have to be a problem, but keep in mind that commercial interests may play a role.
- Is there a quality assessment? If so, is there an editorial staff? Are articles 'peer-reviewed'? Particularly in the case of *peer review* (see step 3 information sources: level), there is a high degree of reliability because various experts/scientists have already critically assessed such an article.

# Content

## **Correctness**

- Are the facts right? Check if they are confirmed in another source. Note: if you always see the same literal text, then the information is cut and pasted and it is unlikely that the creators of the website have checked the information.
- Are opinions supported by facts?
- Does the information come from a primary source or from the second hand?

## **Objectivity**

- What is the purpose of the information? Is the purpose of information, opinion formation, propaganda etc.?
- Is it about (hard) facts or opinions?
- Is the subject discussed from several viewpoints?

## **Quality of the information source**

- Does the information source look professional?

## **Controllability**

- Is there a reference to the source? What is the quality of these sources? Is it possible to check whether information is correct and complete?

## Assessing books on relevance and reliability

How do you determine the value of a book? Books on your book list have already been assessed by your study programme. Probably the author is known and appreciated and this book fits in perfectly with the lessons. But how do you judge a book for yourself? As mentioned before, you have to pay attention to relevance and reliability.

### Relevance

Alignment with question and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the information match the questions you have and/or the target group you are writing for?</li><li>• Is a book as an information carrier suitable for your information needs?</li><li>• Does the book give a general picture?</li><li>• Does the level meet your requirements? Also pay attention to authority.</li></ul>
Completeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the book give a complete picture? Are more sources needed?</li></ul>
Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is up-to-date information important to your research?</li><li>• What is the year of publication?</li><li>• Is this the most recent edition?</li><li>• Could you expect that there are now more recent developments?</li><li>• If reference was made to other sources, how recent are they?</li></ul>

## Reliability

Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who is the author and what authority does he have?</li><li>• What is his background and has he published anything before?</li><li>• Is there an editor?</li><li>• For what purpose did the author write the book?</li></ul>
Correctness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the facts right in the book?</li><li>• Are opinions supported by facts?</li></ul>
Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the information displayed objectively?</li><li>• Does the book mainly contain facts or opinions?</li><li>• What is the purpose of the book? Informative, opinion-forming, amusement...</li></ul>
Quality of the book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the book look professional? Who is the publisher?</li></ul>
Controllability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the facts or data verifiable?</li><li>• Are the source references correct?</li><li>• What are the sources?</li></ul>

## **Example**

You write a report in which you have to explain the psychological aspects of the subject. You have found the book *Psychology: core concepts* by Zimbardo.

## **Relevance**

- This overview book explains concepts and theories. Several chapters and paragraphs fit in well with your questions. The level also fits well
- The information in the book seems pretty complete. However, it is advisable to consult more books so that you get a more complete picture and are able to compare quality and usefulness.
- But it's an edition from 2012! Does this edition describe the current state of affairs?

## **Reliability**

- The authors are well-known psychologists. They have several books and articles to their name and these are also quoted by others.
- It is a textbook, professional literature, published by a well-known publisher. The purpose is to inform.
- There is an extensive list of literature, including recent sources. The text refers to this list, so it is possible to check the text.

## **Conclusion**

It is in many ways a good book to use.

But you could check if a newer edition is available.

# Assessing articles for relevance and reliability

Assessing an article is very similar to assessing a book. However, there are differences.

- If currency is important for your research, be extra critical when assessing journals. Magazines are usually aimed at providing up-to-date information. New information is quickly made available via (professional) journals. They often appear on a weekly or monthly basis.
- Peer review can play a role in the assessment of journals. A "peer reviewed" article has already been assessed for quality by several subject specialists.

## Relevance

Connection to question and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the information answer the questions you have?</li><li>• Does the information match the questions you have and/or the target group you are writing for?</li><li>• Does the article give a general picture?</li><li>• Does an article, as an information form, meet your information needs?</li></ul>
Completeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gives the article a complete picture? Are more sources needed?</li></ul>
Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How up-to-date does the information need to be, given your research?</li><li>• What is the year of publication?</li><li>• Can you expect that there are now more recent developments?</li><li>• If reference was made to other sources, how recent are they?</li></ul>

## Reliability

Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who is the author and what authority does he/she have?</li><li>• What is his background, has he/she published anything before?</li><li>• Does the author belong to a certain (research) institution or organisation?</li><li>• For what purpose did the author write the article?</li><li>• Is “peer review” important in your research? Does it happen when the article is written?</li></ul>
Correctness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the facts in the article correct?</li><li>• Are opinions well-founded?</li></ul>
Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the information displayed objectively?</li><li>• Does the article mainly contain facts or opinions?</li><li>• What is the purpose of the article? Information, opinions, entertainment, commerce...</li></ul>
Quality of the journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What does it look like, who published it?</li></ul>
Controllability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the facts or data verifiable?</li><li>• Are the source references correct? What are the sources?</li></ul>




## Example:



Brief Communication | [Open Access](#) | Published: 30 August 2015

# Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Ecuador: A Pilot Study in Quito

[Laura M. S. Dekkers](#) , [Norbert A. Groot](#), [Elena N. Díaz Mosquera](#), [Ivonne P. Andrade Zúñiga](#) & [Martine F. Delfos](#)

*Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* **45**, 4165–4173(2015) | [Cite this article](#)

**1812** Accesses | **6** Citations | **19** Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

## Abstract

This research presents the results of the first phase of the study on the prevalence of pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular education in Quito, Ecuador. One-hundred-and-sixty-one regular schools in Quito were selected with a total of 51,453 pupils. Prevalence of ASD was assessed by an interview with the rector of the school or its delegate. Results show an extremely low prevalence of 0.11 % of pupils with any ASD diagnosis; another 0.21 % were suspected to have ASD, but were without a diagnosis. This low prevalence suggests that children and adolescents with ASD are not included in regular education in Quito. These results are discussed in the light of low diagnostic identification of ASD and low inclusion tolerance.

You are writing a report on the occurrence of developmental disorders, especially in the autism spectrum in South America. You found the article Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Ecuador: A pilot study in Quito. One of the authors is Martine F. Delfos. The article was published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* in an episode from 2015.

## Relevance

- The article fits well with your question, it gives an interesting view on the subject
- For a more complete picture of your subject and other points of view, you are still looking for additional information.
- The article will be published in 2015 and is therefore quite recent.

## Reliability

- One of the authors, Martine F. Delfos is a well-known researcher and is a key author. She has written several books and articles and these are often quoted as well.

- The aim of the authors is to inform about the prevalence of pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular education. The study was conducted in Quito, Ecuador, South America.
- the outcome of the study is that the situation of children, adolescents, and adults with ASD in Ecuador is probably very difficult. The researchers paint a picture of the current situation of children with ASD in Ecuador. This information can be used as an example in your report.
- A scientific journal meets the requirements of a theoretical framework. Peer review confirms the findings of a study.
- There is a literature list, but there are not many references to research in other South American countries.

## **Conclusion**

It's a good article and written by experts. However, it would be better if you also used more recent articles or books for your report.

## Assessing websites for relevance and reliability

Anyone can publish on the Internet. This means that there is a lot of reliable but also a lot of unreliable information to be found. There is often no quality control by an editorial staff or colleagues. A great way to determine the credibility of a website is by using the Web Page Credibility Checklist, originally created by Samira Saliba Phillips.

<https://parkmstech.pbworks.com/f/Credibility+Checklist+07.pdf>

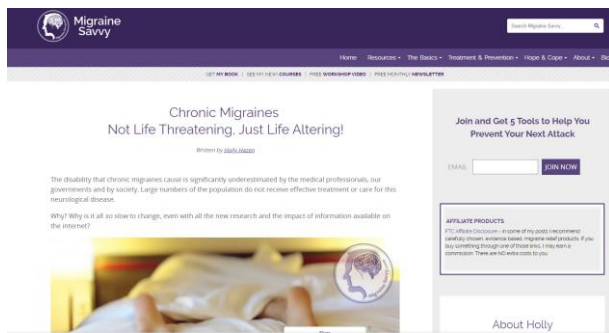
### Relevance

Connection to question and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the information answer the questions you have?</li><li>• Does the information match the questions you have and/or the target group you write for?</li><li>• Does the information on the website give a general picture?</li><li>• Is a website or article on that site suitable as a source for your research?</li></ul>
Completeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the retrieved information give a complete picture? Do you need more sources?</li></ul>
Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How up-to-date should the information be, given your research?</li><li>• When was the text posted online?</li><li>• When was the site last updated?</li><li>• Could you expect more recent developments?</li><li>• If reference was made to other sources, how current are they?</li></ul>

## Reliability

<p>Authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it clear who wrote the information? What authority does he have?</li> <li>• What is his background and has he published anything before?</li> <li>• Was the website built by a person or on behalf of an organisation or company?</li> <li>• Are there contact details? Is there anything said about the purpose and realization of the website?</li> </ul>
<p>Correctness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the facts right?</li> <li>• Are opinions supported by facts and/or references?</li> </ul>
<p>Objectivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the information displayed objectively?</li> <li>• Does the information mainly contain facts or opinions?</li> <li>• What is the purpose of the article? Informative, influential, entertaining, commercial... What are the authors' interests?</li> <li>• If you want to check this, look on the website for sections such as About this site, Disclaimer or Colophon. You can also retrieve information from the web address:  <i>.org</i> = non-profit organization  <i>.gov</i> = government  <i>.edu</i> or <i>.ac.uk</i> = education (education, often a university)  <i>.com</i> = company (companies, commercial)  <i>.info</i> = for companies (non-profit or commercial)  <i>members.chello.com/</i> ;  <i>geocities.com/users/</i> = personal</li> </ul>
<p>Quality of the website</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the website look professional,</li> <li>• Do the hyperlinks work,</li> <li>• Are there many errors?</li> </ul>
<p>Controllability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the facts or data verifiable?</li> <li>• Are there professional organizations / websites that refer to this site? Many search engines have the possibility to look it up.</li> <li>• Are the source references correct? What are the sources?</li> </ul>

## Example:



You're writing an article about migraines. You found this website through Google:

<https://www.migrainesavvy.com/chronic-migraines.html>

## Relevance

- The site contains a lot of information about migraine but it is a .com website.

## Topicality:

- The colophon indicates that the website has been maintained (2010-2020) but the articles themselves have no date.

## Reliability

- The author of the website is a migraine patient herself and through this way she wants to share her personal experiences which are supplemented with factual information she gets from books and other websites.
- The author is a qualified professional counselor according to her profile description. It is not possible to find out exactly what her qualifications are.
- Through this website she wants to sell her e-courses and e-books.
- The website is intended for educational purposes only and not as a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis or treatment.
- The articles are interrupted by advertisements
- In the case of articles, sources are mentioned, but these usually refer to other websites, not to scientific articles.

## Conclusion

The website looks well maintained, but it is clear that there is also a commercial aspect to it. The information provided is often based on personal experience and factual information, the sources of which are not demonstrably scientific. The author herself has no scientific publications on her name. The website can therefore not be used as a scientific source.