Finding Good Information:

Understanding how to research a topic using credible, authoritative, accurate sources

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Not all information sources should be treated as equal. They may differ in: quality, accuracy, credibility, significance, authoritativeness, relevance, date published, audience level, etc.

How would you compare the two information sources below that both discuss plate tectonics?

1. Terra non Firma Earth: Plate Tectonics is a Myth
   - Format: eBook
   - ISBN: 0 952 2603 28
   - Publisher: Oneoff Publishing.com
   - Pages: 255
   - Figures: 74

   The World Wide Web site of Dr. James Maxlow disputing plate tectonics and proposing an alternative theory of an expanding earth. Note: The author published an online book and has lectures on YouTube.

2. Global Tectonics, 3rd Edition
   - Philip Kearey, Keith A. Klepeis, Frederick J. Vine
   - ISBN: 978-1-4051-0777-8
   - Paperback
   - 496 pages
   - January 2009, Wiley-Blackwell

   A Scholarly book by several scientists published by one of the top science publishers, and widely used as a university textbook for teaching the current knowledge of plate tectonics.
Questions to Ask:

• What kind of information is it?
  - Book
  - Government Document
  - Journal or Magazine
  - Website
  - Others?

• Is it scholarly or popular?
  - Who wrote it?
  - Who is the intended audience?
  - Who published it?
  - Does it cite authentic research?
More Questions:

- **Is it peer reviewed?**
  - Was it examined by other experts before publication?
  - Was the author required to include the research method?
  - Is there a bias?
  - Was the author paid for the research?

- **Is it worth retrieving and reading?**
  - Is it current?
  - Is it relevant to the topic at a specific level?
  - Is the source trustworthy?
Accuracy & credibility of information is important. One type of information source is not always better than another type...

Rather some information is more appropriate, authoritative, and/or effective when used in some discussion or publication venues.

**Topic 1:**
The health effects of spraying tordon to kill weeds...
**Scholarly**

**Topic 3:**
Environmental history of a particular river...
**Both**

**Topic 2:**
Cycles of nature for elementary school students...
**Popular**
An Example

Class Topic:
Climate Change in Montana
A Simple Google Search:
What do you notice?

Who published it?

Is it relevant?

Who sponsors the info?
The Same Search in Web of Science:
What differences do you notice?

- Is it current?
- Who published it?
- Is it peer-reviewed?
Remember:
Where you search determines what you find.

General web searches may produce mixed & uncertain results.

Searching the best databases with precise search statements usually produces more relevant and authoritative results.

A skeptical researcher is a good researcher.

If you need further assistance with searching, ask a librarian.