

Selecting Useful Information

What is it? When you research a topic, you need to determine which information is useful and which isn't. Useful information is relevant, essential, and verifiable. Information is **relevant** if it is connected to your topic. Information is **essential** if you cannot answer your research question without it. Information is **verifiable** if you can find it in other reliable sources.

How to do it. Examine each piece of information in your reading. Does it help define, explain, or give details about your topic? Can you verify the information?

Try it. Suppose that you are researching this question: *What was daily life like for a Civil War soldier?* You have found firsthand information in letters from a Union soldier to his mother. In a chart, list information from the reading. Decide if it is relevant, essential, and verifiable for your topic. An example has been done for you.

For a few days . . . both armies are on very friendly terms. Well today I was out on the line and there was a lot of Rebs there and one of them invited me to go with him . . . Had a great chat. . . .

Desertions from their army are quite numerous . . . I had on a pair of fine Gaiters and one of them asked me the price. I told him and he said they would cost in Petersburg \$150. Common shoes cost 60 & 70 Dolls. Common letter paper 50 cts per sheet & mighty hard to get at that. They say themselves that they have had no coffee or sugar for 4 weeks.

You need not be alarmed about my health for I have good heavy blanket and warm clothes. My boots was not very good but we have all drawed a good pair of government shoes. . . . There is about half a dozen men in our regiment that are sick. . . .

—Papers of Tilton C. Reynolds, 1851–1963. Library of Congress: Manuscript Division.

Information	Relevant?	Essential?	Verifiable?
Union soldier reports many desertions from the Confederate army.	yes, part of soldier's daily life	maybe not, for this topic	probably