

Software Evaluation Criteria

You can evaluate five aspects of a program with these criteria categories:

- information in the program,
- career development process,
- user interaction,
- technical aspects of the software and materials, and
- support services.

There are few software programs, even comprehensive career information systems, to which you would apply all 67 of the criteria listed. You will need to omit the criteria that are not appropriate to the type of program you are evaluating.

Some of the criteria are standards of quality that any career development software program should meet. These include such standards as nondiscriminatory language, current and valid information, user control of decision making, program reliability, and availability of technical assistance. Use these important standards of quality to rate every program.

Other criteria (e.g., inclusion of test results or appropriateness for small group use) are features which may not be important for a particular type of program. Do not rate items that are not applicable to the kind of product you are evaluating; cross out their rating scales instead.

If you are rating one program and doing it yourself, you can select criteria and do the rating at the same time. However, if you are comparing several programs, or if several people are doing independent ratings, you first need to make several copies of the rating form. In that case, cross out the criteria that are not applicable, then make copies of the rating form.

For each applicable criterion, rate the program:

5 = Outstanding 4 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 2 = Poor 1 = Unsatisfactory

After you have finished rating the program, you can construct a summary score for it. If you want a summary score, sum the points assigned and divide the total points by the number of items rated, omitting the items you decided were not applicable. Use the overall numeric score only as a guide. If an essential criterion is rated unsatisfactory, you may decide to reject the program even if some of its features are attractive.

Information in the Program

These information criteria cover the following aspects of the program: relevance to the audience, appropriate language, organization of the information, and information quality.

	Outstanding				Unsatisfactory			
1. The information is clear, concise, and informative to the intended audience	5	4	3	2	1			
2. The language is nondiscriminatory. Content is free from race, ethnic, gender, age, and other stereotypes	5	4	3	2	1			
3. The content is free from spelling and grammatical errors	5	4	3	2	1			
4. All subjects are covered in a comprehensive manner. For example, information about all types of occupations is presented, it covers	5	4	3	2	1			

90% of total employment in the area where the program is being used. Or, if the information applies specifically to one field of training, it covers all relevant instructional programs

5. The information for each topic encourages comparisons among schools or occupations	5	4	3	2	1
6. Occupational information covers standard occupational categories, duties, abilities, skills, working conditions, equipment, earnings, employment, outlook, training, and methods of entry. It identifies related occupations	5	4	3	2	1
7. Information about educational programs covers program objectives, specialties, degrees conferred, sample courses, and schools offering the program	5	4	3	2	1
8. Information about schools includes general information, admissions, programs of study, housing, costs, financial aid, and student service	5	4	3	2	1
9. The program lists only schools that meet basic licensing requirements. It reports accreditation by recognized organizations	5	4	3	2	1
10. The information is based on empirical data that are current and valid	5	4	3	2	1
11. Updated information is distributed promptly, at least yearly	5	4	3	2	1
12. In a personal search questionnaire, there is a clear, empirical relationship between characteristics of the user and those of the occupations, schools, or other activities being sorted	5	4	3	2	1
13. In a program using off-line or computer-administered assessment instruments, those instruments conform to accepted standards of validity and reliability	5	4	3	2	1
14. Advice is clearly distinguished from factual information. The sources of advice are identified	5	4	3	2	1
15. Statements made in one component are consistent with those made in other components of the program	5	4	3	2	1
16. If the program produces only lists of titles, it effectively refers users to specific sources of accurate information	5	4	3	2	1
17. Published information sources are readily available, for example, in local career information centers	5	4	3	2	1
18. To supplement objective information, the program suggests interviewing individuals about their personal career histories, including how they feel about their schools or jobs	5	4	3	2	1

Career Development Process

These criteria evaluate the compatibility of the program with important career development principles.

	Outstanding				Unsatisfactory
19. The program motivates individuals to develop their own career plans	5	4	3	2	1
20. The program fosters self-knowledge relevant to work and learning	5	4	3	2	1
21. The program helps individuals to integrate and develop their values, interests, abilities, skills, and goals	5	4	3	2	1
22. Using the program broadens an individual's awareness of current options for employment and education	5	4	3	2	1
23. If there is a search process, it broadens the outlook of individuals regardless of their race, ethnic group, gender, or age	5	4	3	2	1

24. The program supports informed decision making by helping individuals generate ideas, obtain necessary information, and evaluate alternatives in responsible and personally relevant ways	5	4	3	2	1
25. The program encourages the user to get appropriate counseling and advice in making long term decisions	5	4	3	2	1
26. Using the program integrates planning with previous experiences	5	4	3	2	1
27. The user, not the program, controls the decision making	5	4	3	2	1
28. The structure of the program demonstrates that career planning is a developmental, lifelong process	5	4	3	2	1
29. The program is appropriate for individual use	5	4	3	2	1
30. The program is appropriate for small group use	5	4	3	2	1
31. The program can be a useful resource in a counseling program	5	4	3	2	1
32. The program provides information that can be useful in instruction	5	4	3	2	1
33. The program can be a useful resource in a job search program	5	4	3	2	1
34. Using the program contributes to a person's career development	5	4	3	2	1

User Interaction

These criteria cover the user's interaction with the program, the objectives and features of the program, and your analysis of it.

	Outstanding				Unsatisfactory
35. The purpose of the program is well defined and clearly explained to the user	5	4	3	2	1
36. The organization is clear, logical, and effective, making it easy for the intended audience to understand	5	4	3	2	1
37. The language in the program and in the user's guide is clear to the intended audience	5	4	3	2	1
38. User materials are easy to use, appealing to users, and readily available	5	4	3	2	1
39. Prerequisites are identified and instruction is provided in the software or in the user guides so individuals can run the program and understand its results	5	4	3	2	1
40. The individual has the choice of going directly to desired information or using a structured search to identify relevant topics	5	4	3	2	1
41. The individual can operate the program independently, creating his or her own sequence of presentation and review	5	4	3	2	1
42. The program acknowledges input. Feedback on user responses is employed effectively	5	4	3	2	1
43. Invalid commands are handled constructively. The program tolerates variations in command formats (e.g., upper or lower case, extra spaces, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
44. Individuals can easily start and exit the program. It is easy to back up, change answers, and give commands	5	4	3	2	1
45. If there are "help" and "hint" messages, they are easy to access	5	4	3	2	1
46. If the program contains tests of knowledge or skill, it reports which items were missed and which were correct	5	4	3	2	1
47. The program is attractive and interesting. It motivates users to continue using the program and exploring career options	5	4	3	2	1

48. The program is demonstrably effective with the intended audience, including people of varying abilities and experiences	5	4	3	2	1
49. The program can be used by various cultural groups	5	4	3	2	1
50. The program achieves its purpose	5	4	3	2	1

Technical Aspects of the Software and Materials

These criteria cover aspects of the computer hardware and programs.

	Outstanding				Unsatisfactory
51. The system uses standard equipment that is reliable, widely available, and applicable to a variety of uses	5	4	3	2	1
52. Computer capabilities such as graphics, color, or sound are used for appropriate instructional reasons	5	4	3	2	1
53. If the program requires special equipment, the requirements are minimal and clearly stated by the developer	5	4	3	2	1
54. The program is reliable in normal use. Software is bug free	5	4	3	2	1
55. The program provides a copy or summary of its basic information to the user for future reference	5	4	3	2	1
56. Printouts are clear and well organized. The printouts are dated	5	4	3	2	1
57. Updates can be loaded easily into the system	5	4	3	2	1
58. If any processing in the program is based on assessment scores, course grades, or other client records, the program explains to the user how the records are being used	5	4	3	2	1
59. If the program uses client records, it does not restrict an individual in exploring any of the information in the program	5	4	3	2	1
60. If the program creates a permanent record for a user, that record is secure and confidential. There is provision for erasing the record when the information is no longer valuable in providing services	5	4	3	2	1

Support

These criteria cover aspects of support for professionals who implement the program: written materials, staff training, service, and cost.

	Outstanding				Unsatisfactory
61. The site coordinator's manual explains the content and process for updating information	5	4	3	2	1
62. Print or computer materials explain the content and effective use of the program to local site coordinators	5	4	3	2	1
63. Training on appropriate and effective use of the program is provided	5	4	3	2	1
64. There is a system of communication between user sites and the system developer which may include newsletters, telephone assistance, and annual evaluations	5	4	3	2	1
65. On-site technical assistance is available for effective program use	5	4	3	2	1
66. Evaluations of the program's effectiveness are available to site coordinators	5	4	3	2	1
67. The cost per user makes it feasible to serve most clients who can benefit from the program	5	4	3	2	1

Summary Comments

Major Strengths:

Major Weaknesses:

Other Comments:

Evaluation prepared by:_____

Date: _____