

## How can you evaluate information?

To strengthen your skill at evaluating, use the three steps listed below. You will see them in action one by one on the following screens.

**Step 1:** Establish a set of standards.

**Step 2:** Identify the positive and negative aspects of the information.

**Step 3:** Summarize your evaluation.

.

## Step 1: Establish a set of standards.

Think about the statement, “It is warm today.” What is the standard for warm? It might depend on the location and time of year. Each of these might be warm:

- a temperature of 100° F in Dallas, Texas, on May 1
- a temperature of 75° F in Des Moines, Iowa, on November 1
- a temperature of 50° F in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on January 1

Similarly, the meaning of *justice*, *fairness*, and many other terms depends on the standards you establish.

# Evaluating

**Directions:** The three traits listed below help define a judge as fair. What standards could you use to evaluate each one?

1. The judge knows the law.

The judge attended a respected law school, has worked in the legal system for many years, and rarely has decisions overturned by higher courts.

2. The judge displays independence from outside pressure.

The judge issues rulings that politicians dislike, that go against powerful interests, or that upset voters.

3. The judge treats people with respect.

The judge expresses thanks to people who serve on juries, receives good evaluations from lawyers, and focuses on legal issues in rulings.

# Evaluating

**Step 2:** Identify the positive and negative aspects of the information.

Whether something is positive or negative often depends on two things:

- your preferences
- the circumstances

For example, would a one-foot snowstorm be positive or negative?

	Positive	Negative
Preference: your attitude toward snow	I like snow.	I dislike snow.
Circumstance: your plans for the day	I want to go skiing.	I want to run several errands.

# Evaluating

Cluster 1 page 13

**Directions:** Discuss the possible positives and negatives of each action by a judge. One response is provided as a sample.

Action	Positive	Negative
Overturns a lower court decision	The judge stands up for justice.	
Allows a man accused of murder to go free		
Receives money for a campaign to get reappointed		

# Evaluating

Cluster 1 page 13

**Directions:** Discuss the possible positives and negatives of each action by a judge.

Action	Positive	Negative
Overturns a lower court decision	The judge stands up for justice.	The judge ignores other courts.
Allows a man accused of murder to go free	The judge resists public pressure for convictions.	The judge is too soft on criminals.
Receives money for a campaign to get reappointed	People want the judge to stay in office.	People are trying to buy the judge's favor.

# Evaluating

## Step 3: Summarize your evaluation.

Evaluations often include both positive and negative comments. If you summarize them in a short passage, such as a sentence or paragraph, you can indicate the balance between them.

Imagine evaluating a movie in which you liked the lead actor but not the plot. Your evaluation might mention both of these specifics as well as a more general statement:

The lead actor was wonderful, but the plot was so hard to follow that I think the movie was weak overall.

## Evaluating

Cluster 1 page 13

**Directions:** Use the three steps presented on previous screens to evaluate whether the person described should be a judge.

The candidate served as government prosecutor for 15 years before spending the past 10 years as a defense attorney. She has an excellent reputation among other lawyers for the way she treats others in court cases. However, she has actively lobbied the legislature to change the election laws to benefit members of her political party.



# Evaluating

**Step 1:** Establish a set of standards.

A judge should be knowledgeable, independent, and respectful.

**Step 2:** Identify the positive and negative aspects of the information.

Her experience as both a prosecutor and a defense attorney is positive. Her reputation among other lawyers is positive. Her lobbying work to aid her political party might be negative.

**Step 3:** Summarize your evaluation.

The candidate sounds knowledgeable and respectful, but she might not be independent.