Evaluating Sources

Unfortunately, not all sources are created equal. When considering what sources to use for an essay, it is important to analyze the credibility of a source to determine whether or not it is considered academically viable.

What makes a reliable source?

A good source:
- Comes from a reputable organization or individual (for example, from a peer-reviewed journal, a school database, or a news organization, such as the Associated Press)
- Has a well-qualified author (if known)
- Can be cross-checked (information found in the piece can be confirmed elsewhere, unless it is new research)
- Backs up all of its claims
- Uses a mix of primary and secondary sources (if it is a research paper)
- Acknowledges other viewpoints

Examples of Reliable Sources

General sources:
- JSTOR
  This database includes journals, primary sources, and books.
- EBSCO
  This database has a variety of sources across all principles.
- The Associated Press
  This is a news organization that publishes standards for all news organizations to follow.

For the sciences:
- Infection and Immunity
  This scholarly journal from UT Dallas details insights into interactions between bacterial, fungal, and parasitic pathogens and their hosts.
- PubMed
  This database includes data from federally funded studies for the public to view.

For the arts, humanities, and interdisciplinary studies:
- The American Historical Review
  This journal, put out by Oxford’s department of A&H, has information about American history.
- Dallas Museum of Art (website)
  This website, put out by the DMA, has information about a variety of art pieces.

For economics and political sciences:
Cambridge Journal of Economics
This journal, put out by Oxford, details new information regarding economics and studies involving it.

CIA World Factbook
This website, put out by the CIA, has detailed information about a variety of nations, as well as demographic data regarding most of the world.

What makes an unreliable source?
A bad source:
- Does not come from a reputable source (for example, tabloids or chain emails)
- Has an unqualified author (if known)
- Has information that cannot be cross-checked (Information is only found at this source. The exception to this rule is new research or new studies.)
- Does not back up its claims
- Uses few sources, usually of just one type (if it is a research paper)
- Does not acknowledge other viewpoints, or does so only to mock them

Examples of unreliable resources
World News Daily Report, The Onion, Daily Mail, US Magazine, chain emails, non-peer reviewed journals or studies

Practice
Try to evaluate the following sources.
- Medical Hypotheses (journal)
- The Economist
- The Exley (journal)
- Journal of the History of Sexuality (journal, UT Austin)
- The Daily Currant

When reviewing them, consider these questions:
- Is the source from a reputable author or organization?
- Is the content creator qualified to write about the subject?
- Does the content creator back their claims up with evidence?
- How can I confirm that this data is accurate?
- If this is a scientific study, are the results replicable? Was the experiment well-constructed?

How to locate scholarly sources
In order to locate scholarly sources, one can use information databases, such as those found on the McDermott Library’s website. Making use of accredited databases such as PubMed (public information about federally funded research), JSTOR or CIA World Factbook are all viable options. Google Scholar is also a viable option for pointing oneself in the direction of books, papers, and other source material, if the information cannot be located elsewhere.
Contact
Want to learn more about evaluating sources? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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