Chapter Two - Finding and Evaluating Sources

How do you find academic sources?

If you are a student or a scholar, the best place for finding academic journals, research papers and articles is probably your university library. It is there to serve the educational objectives of the various departments on campus, so it should give you access to databases and have some relevant journal subscriptions that will allow you to access many articles for free. If you have access to a public library, it will also have some journals, books and magazines, which may be useful for your research. If you do not have access to a library, you may be able to do some research online, but you should be very careful about what you find.

Types of sources

Sources can be divided into three main categories: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary sources are the original sources of information about a topic. They include historical documents, statistical data, novels, photographs, works of art, audio and video recordings, speeches, diaries, interviews, and the results of experiments. Secondary sources discuss or interpret primary sources. They can be articles in newspapers or magazines, book reviews, or articles in journals which analyze or evaluate someone else’s original research. Tertiary sources are summaries of a topic which may contain both primary and secondary sources. An example of a tertiary source would be an encyclopedia, a dictionary, or a textbook.

Write down one specific example of a primary source, a secondary source, and a tertiary source.

primary source .................................................................
secondary source .............................................................
tertiary source .................................................................

In groups, tell each other your examples.

Academic journals

In academic writing, if you want your thesis to be strong, you should support it with scientific evidence and expert opinion, such as those found in academic journals. Wikipedia maintains a list of academic journals on its website. Find the list, browse it, and write down the titles of three journals that interest you for your research.

Were you able to access the full articles freely, or just the abstracts?

1) ................................................................. full articles  abstracts only
2) ................................................................. full articles  abstracts only
3) ................................................................. full articles  abstracts only

Traditional media

What you read in newspapers and magazines, watch on television, and hear on the radio may not necessarily be accurate. You should consider the mission and purpose of the media company, try to understand the whole story not just the headlines, research the people behind it to see if they are real and credible, check the date, assess supporting documents, look for conflicts of opinion, review your own biases, and seek out alternative independent sources that may help to confirm or deny the veracity of the report.
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Reliable traditional media sources

Complete the chart below with sources that you believe to be reliable.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My Country</th>
<th>The USA</th>
<th>The UK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV Station</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio Station</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
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</table>

Now discuss your choices within your group. Do you all agree with each other?

The Internet

The Internet is not regulated for quality or accuracy and almost anyone can publish anything that they want. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the user to find appropriate sources efficiently and evaluate them wisely.

Searching the Internet

Whenever you query an Internet search engine, the results that are returned may be commercial (who has paid the most for your search terms), or ranked by relevance, or based on your previous search history. One way to improve the quality of your queries is by restricting your search to a specific domain. For example, `.gov` is used by government agencies of the United States, and `.edu` is used by its affiliated institutions of higher education.

What are the Internet domain suffixes for your country?

government: ..........................................

education: ..........................................

Domain restricted search queries

The search term, “site:” will allow you to narrow your searches to specific sites or domains. For example, “site:.gov reagan cold war” should return a list of links about Ronald Reagan and his role in the Cold War written or endorsed by the United States government.

Similarly, “site:.ac.uk brexit” should return a list of links about the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union written by academics of British Universities.

The query, “site:.gutenberg.org shakespeare” will return books written by Shakespeare on the Project Gutenberg website, and “site:facebook.com smith” will probably return actor Will Smith’s and singer Sam Smith’s personal Facebook pages.
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If you were researching how globalization has affected Japan and you wanted to restrict your results to only publications of American universities, what would you type as your search engine query?

“Site:........................................................................................................................”
Try it out online. What search results were returned?

Now write one of your own. Choose a specific domain or site and your own search term. Write your search query below. Then try it out online.

“Site:........................................................................................................................”
What search results were returned?

Other useful search tips

1) To search for an exact phrase, use quotations marks. For example, “Nobel Peace Prize 2017” will exclude other Nobel awards, other peace prizes, and other years; The exact phrase will be returned in your results.
2) Use an asterisk (*) to search for unknown words. For example, “greatest * in the world”, will return a variety of items being referred to in connection with being the greatest in the world.
3) Put a minus sign in front of a word that you want to leave out. For example, “golf -car” will return information about golf but not cars.
4) To search social networking services, put @ in front of the organization. For example, “donald trump @facebook” should return President Trump’s Facebook page and also his son’s.
5) Put “AND” between two words if you are searching for both of them. For example, “clinton hillary AND bill” will return information about both Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton, but not either.
6) If you want your search query to be in the web page title, use “ti:”. For example, “ti:catcher in the rye” should return links with “Catcher in the Rye” as part or all of the title page.

Now try three search queries of your own using the tips above.

search query 1: ...........................................................................................................
search query 2: ...........................................................................................................
search query 3: ...........................................................................................................

How were your results? Discuss what you tried, and what you discovered within your group.
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Academic search engines

*Wikipedia* maintains a list of academic databases and search engines. Browse the discipline column of this list and review one that relates to your research interest.

Which one did you review? .................................................................

Was it useful? ................................................................................

Why or why not? ............................................................................

Using Wikipedia for research

*Wikipedia* is a common starting point for researchers hoping to get a general overview about a specific topic. Its purpose is clearly scholarly as it is an encyclopedia. However, because it can be edited by anyone, it is not considered a credible or authoritative source.

One possible academic use of *Wikipedia* would be to click on the references at the end of the page. If these links lead to academic articles or journals, you may cite them in your paper. Find an article on *Wikipedia* about a topic that you are interested in.

What is the title of your Wikipedia page? ........................................

Click on some of the reference links at the bottom of the page. Are they academic sources?

What is the title of one academic article that you found by clicking on the reference links?

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A cited reference search using Google Scholar

Access Google Scholar.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Stanford University Professor Walter Mischel ran a series of experiments about about delayed gratification. What is the title of this 1972 paper?

........................................................................................................................................

How many scholars cite this study? ..................................................

What is your favorite book? ..............................................................

How many scholars cite your favorite book? ....................................

Click on the “Cited by (number)” link.

Click the checkbox, “Search within citing articles” at the top of the page.

Enter a new search term to search within scholarly articles about your favorite book.

What is the title of one of the articles which cites your favorite book?

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How many scholars cite the article you just found? ............................................

Click on the “Cited by (number)” link and search again using a different search term.

What is the title of one of the papers which is returned in your search results?
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In summary, clicking on references at the end of an article will take you back in time to older articles which the author has referred to in her paper. Conversely, a cited reference search allows you to move forward in time by finding topic specific articles which cite an older article. You may also notice that you can select a year, or custom period of time, to refine your search when performing a cited reference search.

Now review with your partner what you have just learned about searching for academic articles.

Evaluating sources

Is the newspaper article or web page or blog you just read really academic? Use the checklist below to determine its credibility and quality.

Evaluating Sources Checklist

Purpose
☐ Is it written well, with no mistakes?
☐ Is the article at least a few pages long?
☐ Is there a list of references?
☐ Is the article cited in other scholarly texts?

Authority
☐ Is the author an expert, or is it written by a respected organization?
☐ Does the publisher have a reputation for credibility?

Audience
☐ Is it written for academics?
☐ Is it written for intelligent people?

Objectivity
☐ Is the information presented objectively?
☐ Does the author avoid using emotional or biased language?

Accuracy
☐ Can the information in the article be verified by other sources?
☐ Are the references reliable?

Currency
☐ Does the article have a date?
☐ Is the information up-to-date?

If you can answer “yes” to most of these questions, you have a good academic source.
Chapter Two - Body Paragraph Writing

Body paragraph writing.

Last chapter, you wrote a definition paragraph about one topic. Today you and your two partners will write three paragraphs in total about the same topic (one paragraph each).

Take a look at the general topics on page four again and choose one together. Make your general topic specific. Choose three sub-topics from within your specific topic. Write about one of them.

General topic: ................................................................................................
Specific topic: ................................................................................................
Sub-topic A: ..................................... Sub-topic B: .................................
Sub-topic C: .................................
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If you researched your topic, what was your source?
Source: ....................................................................................................................
When you have finished, read your paragraphs aloud within your group.