Evaluating Sources

For every single article you find, whether it's on Google or from a scholarly journal in the library databases, ask yourself the questions under each of the following categories. These questions will help you consider whether or not the source is credible and if it's appropriate for your paper.

Author & Publication Reputation
- Can you identify an author(s) and a publication?
- Quickly google both: what information comes up? Are they credible? Are they biased in anyway? Are the author or publication connected to larger corporations or institutions? How might the author/publication be biased?

Publication Date: Relevance
- When was the text published?
- Depending on your research topic, you may want to make sure you're reading the most current and relevant information or more historical pieces.

Use of Evidence
- What types of evidence does the author(s) use?
- How does the author present and signal sources? Are sources cited? Could you easily locate the sources that the author(s) is drawing from?
- How much evidence or how many sources does the author(s) draw from?
- Do the sources being used seem credible and reputable?

Acknowledgement of Alternative Perspectives
- How many perspectives does the author(s) present?
- Does the author ignore or not include any stakeholders or important perspectives? If so, why?
- Does the author(s) present their argument and perspective as the absolute truth? Or, do they acknowledge its complexity and the insights of alternative perspectives?

Publication Genre & Purpose
- What type of publication is the text from? What is the purpose of that publication?
- If it's a scholarly journal, you might consider reading their "about" page to learn more about what types of topics and what kind of work they publish.
- Try to avoid: dictionaries, encyclopedias, textbooks, "objective" news coverage"

Readability
- Can you easily read and understand the entire article?
- Some struggle to read a longer essay is OK, but you should not use or cite any article that is too theoretical, has disciplinary or scientific jargon you don't understand, or that you generally cannot accurately talk or write about because of the difficulty of the text.

Connection to Your Purpose
- How will this source further your own thinking and project?
- How will you use it in your essay?

Scholarly vs. Non-Scholarly Sources

Another distinction we make in evaluating sources is whether or not a source is scholarly or not. Scholarly sources are a very narrow category; however, they represent research that is evaluated and reviewed by peer scholars within a field. We look to them to learn about how academics at the topic of their field are engaging in important topics.

Although not as thorough, academic, and credible, non-scholarly are still useful! We read non-scholarly texts all the time and they provide entertaining and useful information to us on a daily basis. And, sometimes we use non-scholarly texts to help support and explain our academic projects. As long as a text is well-written, gives credible information, and is appropriate for your project, a non-scholarly text can be a good source to use in a paper.

Scholarly Sources…

- Peer-reviewed by other scholars in the same research area;
- Site credible, authoritative sources;
- Participate in a larger, ongoing conversation on the topic, and this conversation is evident in the scholarly essay;
- Always properly cite their sources—always include a Works Cited, References, or Bibliography and some form of in-text citations;
- Often present information as negotiable or current findings—even when a scholarly article is arguing for one way of looking at things, they will at least acknowledge that there are other ways of looking;

Can be found as:

- ✓ Articles in the databases (look for peer-reviewed)
- ✓ Articles in scholarly journals (look for peer-reviewed)
- ✓ Books, usually published by University presses
- ✓ Anthologies—collections of essays on a specific topic that are peer-reviewed (also usually published by university presses)

Non-Scholarly Sources…

- May claim to be citing credible sources, but they may not actually be;
- May not acknowledge the ongoing conversation surrounding the issue;
- May present knowledge as the ultimate truth, the one right perspective on a topic;
- Probably won't cite texts—don't usually use in-text citations or works cited pages (thus, references may be hard to find!).

Non-Scholarly Text Examples:

- ✓ Magazine articles
- ✓ News: on TV, in the newspaper, online, any form!
- ✓ Blogs
- ✓ Encyclopedia: everything from the Britannica set to Wikipedia
- ✓ **Text books**
- ✓ Fiction: all literature, poetry, and other forms of creative writing
- ✓ Speeches
- ✓ Most texts you will find on google or the internet at large!