

Evaluating resources: Home

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Scholarly & Popular Sources

Primary & Secondary Sources [↗](#)

The questions on this page should help you explain why a particular source is a good fit for your research project.

Quick Guide

When you encounter *any* kind of source, consider:

1. **Authority** - Who is the author? What is their point of view?
2. **Purpose** - Why was the source created? Who is the intended audience?
3. **Publication & format** - Where was it published? In what medium?
4. **Relevance** - How is it relevant to your research? What is its scope?
5. **Date of publication** - When was it written? Has it been updated?
6. **Documentation** - Did they cite their sources? Who did they cite?

Slow Guide

Authority

- Who is the author?
- What else has the author written?
- In which communities and contexts does the author have expertise?
 - Does the author represent a particular set of world views?
 - Do they represent specific gender, sexual, racial, political, social and/or cultural orientations?
 - Do they privilege some sources of authority over others?
 - Do they have a formal role in a particular institution (e.g. a professor at Oxford)?

Purpose

- Why was this source created?
 - Does it have an economic value for the author or publisher?
 - Is it an educational resource? Persuasive?
 - What (research) questions does it attempt to answer?

Searching Tips

To find out more about an author:

Google the author's name or dig deeper in the library's biographical source databases.



To find scholarly sources:

When searching library article databases, look for a checkbox to narrow your results to *Scholarly, Peer Reviewed* or *Peer Refereed* publications.

To evaluate a source's critical reception:

Check in the library's book and film review databases to get a sense of how a source was received in the popular and scholarly press.

- Does it strive to be objective?
 - Does it fill any other personal, professional, or societal needs?
- Who is the intended audience?
 - Is it for scholars?
 - Is it for a general audience?

To evaluate internet sources:

The internet is a great place to find both scholarly and popular sources, but it's especially important to ask questions about authorship and publication when you're evaluating online resources. If it's unclear who exactly created or published certain works online, look for *About* pages on the site for more information, or search for exact quotations from the text in Google (using quotation marks) to see if you can find other places where the work has been published.



Publication & format

- Where was it published?
- Was it published in a scholarly publication, such as an academic journal?
 - Who was the publisher? Was it a university press?
 - Was it formally peer-reviewed?
- Does the publication have a particular editorial position?
 - Is it generally thought to be a conservative or progressive outlet?
 - Is the publication sponsored by any other companies or organizations? Do the sponsors have particular biases?
- Were there any apparent barriers to publication?
 - Was it self-published?
 - Were there outside editors or reviewers?
- Where, geographically, was it originally published, and in what language?
- In what medium?
 - Was it published online or in print? Both?
 - Is it a blog post? A YouTube video? A TV episode? An article from a print magazine?
 - What does the medium tell you about the intended audience?
 - What does the medium tell you about the purpose of the piece?

Relevance

- How is it relevant to your research?
 - Does it analyze the primary sources that you're researching?
 - Does it cover the authors or individuals that you're researching, but different primary texts?
 - Can you apply the authors' frameworks of analysis to your own research?
- What is the scope of coverage?
 - Is it a general overview or an in-depth analysis?
 - Does the scope match your own information needs?
 - Is the time period and geographic region relevant to your research?

Date of publication

- When was the source first published?
- What version or edition of the source are you consulting?
 - Are there differences in editions, such as new introductions or footnotes?
 - If the publication is online, when was it last updated?

- What has changed in your field of study since the publication date?
- Are there any published reviews, responses or rebuttals?

Documentation

- Did they cite their sources?
 - If not, do you have any other means to verify the reliability of their claims?
- Who do they cite?
 - Is the author affiliated with any of the authors they're citing?
 - Are the cited authors part of a particular academic movement or school of thought?
- Look closely at the quotations and paraphrases from other sources:
 - Did they appropriately represent the context of their cited sources?
 - Did they ignore any important elements from their cited sources?
 - Are they cherry-picking facts to support their own arguments?
 - Did they appropriately cite ideas that were not their own?

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