

Evaluating Sources

One of the most important steps in the research process is sifting through the wealth of information that is available to find the most relevant and respectable sources.

- **What will the source do for my argument?**

While you will surely need sources that directly support your thesis, not every source has to. Sources can also provide background information, explain unfamiliar concepts, or give alternative interpretations to your argument.

- **Is it a scholarly source?**

Often scholarly sources are required for research assignments. Sometimes determining whether or not a source is “scholarly” can be tricky. Look for these characteristics to determine if you are dealing with a scholarly source:

- Formal presentation and language
- Authors who are experts in their field (scientists and academics), not journalists.
- Proper documentation of the author’s sources
- Original interpretation of sources as opposed to merely summarizing

- **Is this a good source for me?**

As you begin reading the sources you have found, keep in mind that you are not necessarily looking for arguments that you agree with personally, but instead ones that make clear and sound arguments that are logical and well-supported.

- **Assessing a source**

Even if scholarly sources are not required, the sources you choose to use should still meet a certain standard. Here are some tips for evaluating sources:

- Who is the author? Why is his/her word more reliable than anyone else's?
- What organizations are associated with the author/work? Are they reputable?
- Why was this text written? What purpose was it meant to serve and what purpose is it serving for you?
- How up-to-date is the source? Some arguments hold true for generations while others can be discredited (for various reasons) rather quickly. If the source is more than a few years old, has any new information emerged that would contradict it?

- **Assessing an argument**

- What is the thesis?
- Is it supported by evidence or emotional claims?
- Are the facts consistent with other similar sources? Does the author tell you where he got his information?
- Is there any obvious partiality or assumptions that lack evidence?
- Does the author address opposing opinions? If so, is it done well?