

# Evaluating Sources

## FOR YOUR ESSAY

Sometimes it's difficult to determine which sources you should use when writing a paper. While the sources you use may be dependent on the assignment, peer-reviewed (scholarly) articles/journals are typically the most reliable.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE USING ANY SOURCE

What are the author's credentials?

Be careful about using Web sources if you can't locate information about the author.

What is the purpose of the source?

Try to figure out why and for whom the source was written or intended. The content of a work might be questioned if the author has some kind of financial stake in expressing a particular view.

What is the scope of the source?

Try to determine what the source covers and in what depth.

Who published the source?

Be careful when using works published by organizations with a known viewpoint or financial stake in an issue.

How current is the source?

For social and natural sciences, current literature reviews and articles are more relevant than ones from ten years ago. In some fields, currency may not be relevant.

## EVALUATING JOURNAL ARTICLES

Peer-reviewed journals or articles are great sources because articles go through a meticulous editing process before being published. Articles that are considered unsubstantiated or problematic by his/her peers will not be published.

(Articles or journals that are not peer-reviewed are not edited with the same rigor.)

## EVALUATING WEB SOURCES

Ask the following questions when evaluating web sources:

1. Is the author of this site credible?
2. How accurate and objective is the site?
3. What is the site's currency and coverage?

## NEVER CITE WIKIPEDIA

Wikipedia is perfect for looking up quick information or familiarizing yourself with concepts. However, anyone can contribute to Wikipedia, so Wikipedia should never be cited when doing academic research.

BUT

Wikipedia is great for finding other sources of information. Look at the page's footnotes which will likely lead you to works that could be potentially used as sources.

## THE SOURCES YOU USE DEPEND ON YOUR DISCIPLINE

Keep in mind the expectations of your discipline. A source that could be very useful in one major might be a poor source for another. If you have questions about what sources you should use, you can always consult your instructor, a librarian, or tutor.