



FRIDAY FIVE: HOW TO EVALUATE SOURCES

October 18, 2024

Types of Sources

- Scholarly vs Popular

- Scholarly sources are written by highly-qualified researchers and have a thorough publication process, which usually involves peer-reviewing and an extensive list of references at the end of the text. Scholarly sources often have a specific audience in mind, most likely other experts in the particular field of study. Examples of scholarly sources include books and academic journals written by scholars and experts
- Popular sources, on the other hand, are written by and intended for a general audience. Popular sources are not peer-reviewed, and they do not usually include a reference list. Examples of popular sources range from some books and magazines to websites and blogs

- Primary vs Secondary

- A primary source is a firsthand or eyewitness account of information by an individual close to the topic. Examples of primary sources include autobiographies, personal correspondence (e.g., diary entries, letters), government documents, works of art and literature, statistics and data, and newspaper articles written by reporters close to the source. Today, even some social media posts are considered primary sources, because they are firsthand accounts of information.
- A secondary source is a source that is more removed from an event, usually written after the event has happened. Examples of secondary sources include biographies, interpretation of statistics and data, and anything written after an historical event or analyzing something that already happened (e.g., examining a work of art from 100 years ago).

Fact, Opinion, and Propaganda

- Facts are objective. It is something that is known to be true
- An opinion gives the thoughts of a particular individual or group
- Propaganda is the (usually biased) spreading of information for a specific group, event, or case. It often relies on slogans or emotionally-charged images to influence an audience. It can also involve the selective reporting of true information in order to deceive an audience. Propaganda usually has a specific agenda—information in the propaganda is being spread for a certain reason or to accomplish a certain goal
- Examples:
 - Fact: The Purdue OWL was launched in 1994
 - Opinions The Purdue OWL is the best website for writing help
 - Propaganda: Some students have gone on to lives of crime after using sites that compete with the Purdue OWL. The Purdue OWL is clearly the only safe choice for student writers

CRAAP TEST (from Kansas State, BOO!)

- Currency: Look at the publication date and determine whether it is sufficiently current for your topic
 - Ex: An article climate change from the 1980s will not have the same data as one from 2008 or 2018
- Relevance: Consider whether the source is relevant to your research and whether it covers the topic adequately for your needs
- Authority: Discover the credentials of the authors of the source and determine their level of expertise and knowledge about the subject
- Accuracy: Consider whether the source presents accurate information and whether you can verify that information
- Purpose (Objectivity): Think about the author's purpose in creating the source and consider how that affects its usefulness to your research

More on Evaluating Sources

- Identify the language used: Is the language objective or emotional?
 - Objective language sticks to the facts, but emotional language relies on gaining an emotional response from the reader
 - Ex: “Is the cake supposed to be dry?” Vs “What is the texture you wanted this cake to have?”
- Evaluate the sources by asking if there is enough evidence to back up the opinions
 - Does the source over-simplify the topic?
- Cross-Check the information: Verify information in one source with information you find in another source
- Examine the list of references or works cited

How to Look at the Author's Bio

- Find the author's educational background and areas of expertise
- What other publications have they written for? Are the organizations well-known and respected?
- Identify Political Perspective
- Bias is not always bad, but you must be aware of it. Knowing the perspective of a source helps Contextualize the information present

Evaluating Websites

- Currency: Has the site been updated regularly? Can you see when the content you need was added? Does the site show signs of not being maintained (broken links, out-of-date information)?
- Relevance: Think about the target audience for the site. Is it appropriate for you or your paper's audience?
- Authority: Look for an *About Us* link to learn more about the site's creator, their credentials, and the mission of the site
- Accuracy: Does the site present references or links to the sources of information it presents? Can you locate these sources so that you can read and interpret the information yourself?
- Purpose: Consider the reason why the site was created. Can you detect any bias? Does the site use emotional language? Is the site trying to persuade you about something?

Website Domains

- In general, websites are hosted in domains that tell you what type of site it is
 - .com = commercial
 - .net = network provider
 - .org = organization
 - .edu = education
 - .mil = military
 - .gov = U.S. government

HOMEWORK

01

Work on WP2:
Due Wednesday
10/23 by 11:59PM

- DON'T FORGET YOUR REFLECTION!

02

Read “Public
Writing for Social
Change” by
Holmes