Selecting the Right Source

Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, Books, or Online Resources

It is important to think critically about possible sources of information for a paper or project. Who has written the item? Why? What would be credible to a professor or colleague? There are many other questions to consider when doing research.

Many students are particularly confused about when it is appropriate to use newspaper articles, magazine articles, journal articles, or books for their papers. What about World Wide Web resources?

Newspapers

- Audience: General public
- Coverage: Any subject of interest; newsworthy events; local coverage
- Written by: Professional journalists; some articles contributed by specialists
- Timeliness: up-to-date coverage (one-half-day to a week)
- Length: fifty to two thousand words
- Content: Dependent upon the type of article: analysis, statistics, graphics, photographs, editorial opinion; no bibliography or list of sources
- Slant: Tend to be mainstream/neutral but include opinion/perspective pieces

Use newspapers for:

- To find current information about national and international events
- To find stories on local events or issues
- To read editorials, commentaries, and expert or popular opinions

To locate newspaper stories, search iConn; includes online access to the Washington Post, The New York Times, and Wall Street Journal.

Magazines

- Example: Time, Newsweek, Psychology Today, The New Yorker, Fortune, Popular Science
- Audience: General public to knowledgeable layperson
- Coverage: Popular topics; current affairs
- Written by: Professional journalists; not necessarily specialists in the field; poets and writers of fiction, essayists
- Timeliness: Very current coverage (one week to several months)
- Length: 250 to five thousand words
- Content: General discussion; editorial opinion; graphics; photographs; advertisements; usually no bibliography or list of sources
- Slant: May reflect the editorial bias/slant of the magazine
Use a magazine to:

- find information or opinions about popular culture
- locate up-to-date information about current events
- read editorials and commentaries on topics of current interests
- find articles by and for people who are not specialist

To locate magazine articles, search Academic Search Complete or Ebsco Discovery Search.

**Journals**

- Audience: Scholars, specialists, and students
- Coverage: Research results, frequently theoretical in nature
- Written by: Specialists in the field; usually scholars with PhDs
- Timeliness: Current coverage (six months - three years)
- Length: 2,500 to ten thousand words
- Content: Detailed examination; statistical analysis; graphics; bibliography usually included
- Slant: Supposed to present objective/neutral viewpoint; may be difficult to comprehend because of technical language or jargon; often sponsored by professional associations

Use a journal to:

- Locate case studies
- Find original research studies or experiments
- Find out what has been studied on a topic (literature reviews)
- Locate bibliographies of other relevant source materials (references & works cited)

To locate articles, search Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, or other digital indexes and print, or ask a reference librarian for suggestions.

**Internet Sources**

- Audience: General public; children to senior citizens; knowledgeable layperson; scholars; anyone
- Coverage: Popular topics; personal information; current affairs; government information; research; scholarly information; fun and games; and more
- Written by: Anyone, including professional journalists, children, high school students, members of the general public, scholars and researchers, poets and writers of fiction, essayists, college students, advocates and activists, and others
- Timeliness: Varies wildly: may be very current coverage, very out-of-date, or undated
- Length: Can vary greatly
- Content: Anything, including general discussion, editorial opinion, graphics, photographs, advertisements, statistical analysis, detailed analysis, fact, fiction, fraud, and more
- Slant: Varies; may reflect the editorial bias/slant of the creator, may be objective or neutral, may be geared for academic or professional audiences, may be unsupported personal opinion

Use the Internet to:
- Locate information from all levels of government
- Access websites of agencies or organizations of interest
- Access online newspapers or magazines
- Find special Collections or Archives such as The Library of Congress
- Access health & medical sites such as the CDC or NIH

Books

- Example: *College Calculus with Analytic Geometry, Wealth Without Risk, DOS for Dummies, Closing of the American Mind*
- Audience: Ranges from the general public to specialists
- Coverage: In-depth coverage of a topic; compilation of scholarly articles on a topic
- Written by: Specialists/scholars
- Timeliness: Currency varies (two years plus)
- Length: 150 pages plus
- Content: varies from general discussion to detailed analysis; usually includes extensive bibliography
- Slant: Perspective entirely dependent on author; may be sponsored or published by professional associations