



The Betty East Tutoring Center at Victoria College

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Evaluating Sources for Research Projects

Since you are just a student, you will need to use expert sources to validate your research projects. Sources are outside information used to back up information in your paper. ASAC all sources used in your projects:

Author:

- ✓ The author is an authority on the topic, with stated experience and credentials; if this information is not listed on the source, try Googling the author's name to find out more about them
- ✓ May be accredited or endorsed by a reputable group, such as a university
- ✓ Check their educational background; check that they went to a real college and obtained a real degree that is relevant to the topic of the paper
- ✓ The article should contain footnotes, in-text citations, or list references showing where the author obtained their information

Scope:

- ✓ Determine the intended audience; the source should appear to be talking to other scholars, professionals, and similarly educated people
- ✓ Determine the time period covered by the source; ideally, sources should be less than ten years old
- ✓ Online sources should be frequently updated
- ✓ Decide what geographical area is covered; if the paper is about a topic in the United States, but the source covers the topic in Europe, it may not be relevant

Accuracy:

- ✓ Check for bias—the author's opinions should not be affected by income, culture, background, or other factors—if the author seems bitter or overly supportive, there may be bias present
- ✓ If bias is present it must be clearly stated

Commercialism:

- ✓ The source should not try to sell a product or idea; it should not have a corporate sponsor that profits from the source's use or purchase
- ✓ There should be no hidden costs; you should not have to pay for or provide personal information to access information

Good Sources:

- Are written by scholars, academics, and/or professionals in the subject—not just journalists
- Have authors who cite their sources in the text of the source or at the end of the source
- Are aimed at a scholarly audience and give research findings and use a specialized vocabulary
- Are published to share information and findings, not to make money
- Name the author(s) and their qualifications

- Are usually printed in journals and periodicals that come out less frequently, not "Sports Illustrated," "Cosmo," etc., that come out every month
- Are the kind of books/articles found in a college library or a professor's office

Bad Sources:

- May be written by a professional writer, but are not written by an expert
- State opinions instead of facts—examples of these sources include religious texts such as the Bible, Quran, and the Book of Mormon—sources like these should not be used in research projects
- Do not tell you where the author gets their information or how the author is qualified to speak on this subject
- Are written by students or average people (theses, wikis, etc.)
- Are featured on websites or in magazines with a lot of ads, indicating that the source is written to make money
- May be written by anonymous writers
- Can usually be found in a typical bookstore or news stand