Evaluating Sources for Research Projects

Sources include information that can be used to support the thesis of a paper. These sources must be approved, scholarly articles, books, or other forms of communication that will lend authority to the points of the paper.

Look carefully at the source of all online information and make sure it is appropriate for the topic. When in doubt, ask the instructor or a tutor if this source is credible.

Author: The author[s] is an authority on the topic, with stated experience and credentials; more information on the credibility of authors can often be found by researching under the name[s]. Ex: of approved sources:

- ✓ Accredited or endorsed by a reputable group, such as a university
- ✓ Scholarly educational background or current position
- ✓ Articles contain footnotes, in-text citations, or reference list showing the source of the information

Scope:
- ✓ Determine the intended audience; the source should be peer reviewed
- ✓ Determine the time period covered by the source; ideally, sources should be less than ten years old
- ✓ Determine if scholarly online sources have been frequently updated
- ✓ Determine what geographical area is covered; if a topic covers only a certain area of the United States, but the source does not mention that particular part of the country, it may not be relevant

Accuracy:
- ✓ Check for bias—the author's opinions should be clearly stated as such and not fact
- ✓ Sources should be current and from approved databases

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 are listed on library databases and have been peer reviewed or instructor approved
- Are the kind of books/articles found in a college library or a professor's office

Other Sources may be written by a professional writer, but are not written by an expert
- State opinions instead of facts—examples include religious texts or political rhetoric
- Does not identify the source of the information or how the author is qualified to speak on this subject
- Are written by students or an online presence (student project or wikis)
- Are featured on websites or in magazines with ads, indicating that the source is written to make money