



Conducting Research and Evaluating Sources

This handout will cover proper research methods and how to decide if a source is credible.

Places to Search

The Limitations of Wikipedia and Google

Wikipedia and Google are tools, and just like any tool, you have to understand how they are used in order to use them effectively.

Research does not begin and end with Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, and like all encyclopedias, it only gives basic information on a topic. Also, because it is driven by users, the information listed can change from week to week. As such, Wikipedia can be useful for finding basic information such as dates and population figures as well as general information on pop culture. However, it cannot give you depth on a subject required for a well thought out research paper. Use the article's external links and footnotes to start expanding your research.

Google's effectiveness is based on **popularity** rather than **usefulness**. The top hits on Google are based on the number of hits a website gets each day and how much advertising that website produces, rather than on its scholarly merit. For this reason, Google will create a list of what casual users are reading on a subject or what products they are using rather than a detailed cross-examination of a topic.

Where to Find Good Reliable Sources

Below are some sources that can be far more effective for locating reliable sources than Google or Wikipedia.

Auraria Library

[Search the Auraria Library](#)

At Auraria, we are fortunate to share a library with University of Colorado at Denver. Because of this, our Library has a large collection of books and journals in book search and article search. If you are on campus, you can find helpful librarians on staff, or search the stacks for the latest literature on your subject. If off-campus, you can access all the search tools and databases from the library's website. They also provide "Cite It!"—an online tool to help you cite your sources correctly. It's okay to use this tool, but be sure to double check as it is not always 100% accurate.

Tip: play around with the Advanced Search function. This will allow you to narrow results that can sometimes come in overwhelming numbers.

Opposing Viewpoints

[Search Opposing Viewpoints](#)

This is a database hosted by the Auraria Library. It is a wonderful source to continue researching a topic or to help decide on a controversial topic.

Mailing Address: Campus Box 204 | P.O. Box 173363 | Denver, CO 80217

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CQ Researcher

[Search CQ Researcher](#)

CQ Researcher is often the first source that librarians recommend when researchers are seeking original, comprehensive reporting and analysis. It is highly reliable and provides easy-to-read reports on important contemporary and historic events.

A wide range of topics are covered, from social and political issues to environment, health, education, crime, climate change, public policy, and science and technology. Reports often include a chronology, contacts, maps, and graphs, plus a pro/con review of the issue. All resources used are fully cited and often available to read.

Go to the library homepage and enter CQ Researcher in search box, then:

1. Click on **CQR online** link
2. Enter your CCD ID info to complete login.

Research Guides Auraria Library

Use the link below to find subject-specific information about your topic.

[Research Guides at Auraria Library](#)

The screenshot shows the Auraria Library Research Guides homepage. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search the Research Guides: Enter keywords" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there are three tabs: "SORT BY SUBJECT", "ALL RESEARCH GUIDES", and "SORT BY LIBRARIAN". The "SORT BY SUBJECT" tab is active, displaying a grid of subject categories with their respective counts:

Subject	Count
**General Research	27
*Data	4
Accounting & Taxation	1
Anthropology & Archaeology	2
Architecture	4
Art & Art History	6
Aviation & Aerospace	1
Biology	5
Business	7
Chemistry	1
Environmental Studies / Science	2
Ethnic & Multicultural Studies	5
Film & Television	1
Finance & Investing	1
Geography	2
Geology, Hydrology, & Meteorology	2
Health & Medicine	9
Health Administration	2
History	4
Hospitality, Tourism, and Events	2
Mathematics	1
Multi Subject	1
Music	1
Philosophy	1
Physics & Astronomy	1
Political Science	5
Psychology & Counseling	2
Public Affairs & Public Policy	4
Religion	1
Social Work & Human Services	5

On the right side of the page, there is a section titled "Research Guide Content Creators" which displays photos of four staff members: Lorrie Evans, Kelly McCusker, Nikki McCaslin, and Tom Beck. A "More..." button is located below the photos.

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Google Scholar

[Search Google Scholar](#)

Google Scholar is a search tool for finding reliable sources on a topic. It can be found at scholar.google.com. Its search algorithms are based on the number of times an article has been cited by other sources, and by how recently the article was published, which lets you know the article's relevance to the academic field. Use this instead of www.google.com!

Evaluating Sources

Use a Wide Range of Sources

Do not get all of your research from only one source. A wide variety of sources will provide you with different views on a subject rather than a single perspective. This means accessing multiple independent journals, websites, and books, rather than getting all your sources from one place. Research both sides of the issue. Never dismiss the opposing sides of an argument just because you do not agree with it.

Assess Both Sides of an Issue

Effective research includes critical analysis of both sides of an issue. This means finding sources from both the supporting and opposing sides maintaining an objective, analytical approach. Try to give equal weight to each side. Analyze the arguments of each side. How are they constructed? What kinds of rhetoric are they using? Are they appealing to logic or emotion? How do they address the opposing side of the issue? Are there any holes in the arguments? Have they managed to back up their side with adequate research?

Does Your Source Have An Agenda?

Some authors may have their own agenda and will therefore be predisposed to see only one side of an issue or not treat opposing arguments with equal weight. Special interest groups such as the National Rifle Association and Greenpeace are likely to see only one side of an issue. They may have good arguments, but they may be **biased**. [Also in this category: Sources trying to sell you a product or a service—using language like “buy now” or “add to cart”—display an agenda, too.]

Check Who is Funding the Research

Many organizations have an interest in funding research, particularly if that organization can benefit from a particular outcome of the research. For instance, an oil company might fund research on global warming in order to produce results that determine global warming is not man-made or provide token funding to an environmental television program as a gesture of goodwill. The source of funding can therefore determine the results of research.

How Old is the Research?

Human knowledge changes rapidly, particularly in fields such as science and medicine. It is therefore important that you check for the most recent sources because older material becomes rapidly outdated.

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Check Source Footnotes and Works Cited

What sources are the authors citing? Just as in your own paper you cite sources to document for your audience where your ideas came from, so too will other scholars. The authors' sources will tell you the extent of their research as well as provide other possible research leads. Look especially for sources the author is citing that are related to the focus of your research. How many sources does the author use? More sources may indicate more research. Are some authors referencing the same source? If so, the source will be important to the field and you should investigate it as well.

Peer Review

Has the work been peer-reviewed? A work that has been peer-reviewed means it has been looked over by other experts in the field to check for accuracy. Peer-reviewed journals such as *Nature* and the *British Medical Journal* are greatly respected because their research and arguments are more robust.

Word Choice

Check out the language your source is using. Does it sound professional, like jargon, like slang, or somewhere in the middle? Is it appropriate for the topic it is covering? Does it have grammatical errors? Professional wording goes a long way in building ethos for a source.

Style

Analyze the layout of the website. Are there ads popping up every second? Is it using an odd or cartoonish font? Is it YELLING at you? If so, reconsider or further investigate the source.

Remember to Save Often!

Need More Help? Come See Us.

Learn More at the [EXCEL! Zone](#).

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