

LUC WRITING CENTER – “ONLINE SOURCES: GOOD OR BAD?”

Searching online is a fast and easy way to find sources. However, because anyone can publish material online, it is important to know how to evaluate what you find.

What kinds of online sources are there?

- General websites
- Blogs/message boards
- Multimedia sources (news media clips, YouTube, Podcasts, Documentaries, Twitter, Facebook)
- Databases (JSTOR, CQ Researcher, Project Muse, EbscoHost)
- “Traditional” sources (books, articles, reports) published online

Which kind of sources can be used for research?

Depending on what your professor and/or the assignment requires, you can use any type of online source as long as they are credible sources.

How do we evaluate these types of sources?

Generally, the source will:

1. Have a comprehensible site name and a credible domain name (.edu, .org, .gov, .com)
2. State its purpose clearly and provide basic bibliographical information
3. Identify its authors, participants, sponsors, dates of publication, and sources for data or information

Where do we find these sources?

The easiest place to find credible scholarly sources is on [Loyola University’s library website](#). There you can search online journals and books, databases, and other online collections. You can also use search engines like [Google](#) or [Google Scholar](#). However, because these search engines do not filter results, you must evaluate them carefully.

Commonly Used Databases

- Academic Search Complete
- Access World News
- CQ Researcher
- EbscoHost
- JSTOR
- LexisNexis Academic
- PsycINFO
- Project Muse
- ProQuest
- Wilson OmniFile Full Text Select

To access these databases, find them on Loyola University’s library website under the “Databases” [link](#). For a list of commonly used scholarly databases by discipline see [Loyola University’s Research Guides](#).

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Evaluating Online Sources Checklist

When evaluating online sources, look at their **Authority**, **Scope**, and **Presentation**.

Authority:

1. Is the information reliable? Credible? Can you trust it?
2. What are the author’s credentials and affiliations?
3. Does the author provide contact information?
4. Is the source reputable or associated with reputable groups?
5. Does the source use cited information? Does it provide a bibliography? Other links?
6. Is there an obvious organizational or authorial bias?
7. Do other sources cite this particular source?

Scope:

1. Is the information useful? Original? Doubtful? Is it factual or personal opinion?
2. Can you get the information elsewhere? Can you verify the claims?
3. Is the information clearly stated? Is there a thesis or claim?
4. What is the scope of the information? Broad? Narrow?

Presentation:

1. Does the source look professional? Or is it homemade? How does it make you feel?
2. Is the source updated? If so, how frequently?
3. Who is the target audience? Academic? General public?
4. How did you find the source? Prominent result online?
5. What is the domain name? .edu, .gov, .org, .com?

Factors to Consider	Least Reliable	Possibly Reliable	Most Reliable
Type of Source	Unfamiliar website	Published material	Official websites, institutional sites, academic journals
Author’s background	Uncredited	Educated on topic	Expert in the field
Date published	None	Outdated	Recently revised
Depth of source reviews	Controversial reviews	Good public response	Peer-reviewed by reliable sources
Sources cited	None	Credible sources	Citations referencing other (well-cited) works
Objectivity	Clearly biased	Sponsored source	Balanced, neutral, present both sides

Adapted from <http://www.presentation.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Source-Evaluation-Cheat-Sheet.pdf>

Remember: Just because a source does not match these criteria does NOT mean it is not a useful source. Keep your project and needs in mind.