

Finding Sources

You can look in many different places to find credible sources. Print books, newspapers, journal articles, and websites are some of the more frequently used, but you can also use video, radio broadcasts, interviews, and many other types of sources as well. Websites and journal articles will likely be some of your most frequently used sources, so most of this unit will focus on them.

Finding Other Sources

Sources are often gathered at university libraries and are usually free to use. University librarians are happy to help students become familiar with the sources stored at their libraries and in their library databases.

If you have questions about using other sources,

- ask your teacher.
- ask a librarian (university or public).
- See this webpage: <https://edtechbooks.org/-pQNh> .
- See this webpage: <https://edtechbooks.org/-flev> .

Using Website Sources

There are some websites that are useful to cite in academic papers, but there are many websites that you shouldn't use as a source for an academic paper. Websites you may cite in a researched essay include sites like The United States Department of Commerce or NASA. Sites that are not good to use are sites like personal blogs, social media, open-source websites, or forums.

A website URL can tell you a lot about the credibility of a source. If you are on a government website (.gov), people usually feel that the information is more credible than what is written on a commercial website (.com). Educational websites (.edu) and organization websites (.org) are sometimes credible, but you should be careful. You can narrow a Google search by domain extension if you simply type the extension after your search term (e.g., Poverty .gov) in the Google search bar.

Good	. gov
	.edu
	.org
Use with Caution	. com

.co

.net

The website domain extension alone isn't enough to know if the site is a good source. For example, many newspapers and encyclopedias use the *.com* extension and can still be good sources.

Other things you can look at are references, authors, and dates. If you read an educational website that lists references, that is an extra level of confidence that you can trust what they say is true. If you see an author, that is also usually a good sign. Finally, look for a date of publication. If the website was last updated in 1990, using that website probably isn't a good idea. Look for things that are more current, or are at least updated regularly.

What about Wikipedia?

Wikipedia is an excellent place to begin your preliminary research for a topic (but not a source you should cite). Wikipedia can offer background knowledge that will help you decide quickly if you are interested in a topic. You can also use wikipedia to mine for other, better sources. If there are references listed at the end of the article, those references would be an excellent place to start looking for sources you can cite.

Ways to Mine for Better Sources:

1. Click the hyperlinked [#] in the text or full links at the bottom of the page.
2. Read the titles of any articles/books included on the page. Would they be useful? If so, copy and paste them into an internet or library search bar to find the original source.
3. Are there any names that are frequently repeated? These names might be prominent experts on this topic. Copy and paste those names into a search bar to see if you can find out who they are and if they made any sources you could use.



Image: Barraza 2022

Use these methods to avoid having to cite Wikipedia. Avoid citing Wikipedia mountain by mining for the gems of trustworthy sources.

Most teachers will ask you not to cite Wikipedia for several reasons. First, it can change (and does change) frequently. When you write an essay and list references, people should be able to look up your references for more information. If someone looks up a Wikipedia article, it may be different from when you wrote your essay. Second, it can be edited by anyone, so you don't know if the information there is completely accurate. It is a good place to start, but you will need more credible sources for your essay.

Academic Searches

Journal articles (especially those from a respected journal) and books are often considered much more credible than general websites, so it will strengthen your writing to use them.

You may find that journal articles and books are very difficult to understand. It is helpful to start by reading the abstract of an article before you read the entire article. The abstract will give a brief summary of the article. Some students skip the abstract and start reading with the beginning of the introduction, but this will slow you down in your research.

In order to find academic research articles, you should use a library database or Google Scholar.

Databases

Databases are collections of academic sources. Some databases you could use include:

- <https://lib.byu.edu/>
- <https://lib.byu.edu/journals/>
- <https://scholar.google.com/>
- <https://www.jstor.org/>
- <https://edtechbooks.org/-YLGf>
- <https://edtechbooks.org/-NBAi>

For a full list of databases available to BYU students see: <https://lib.byu.edu/databases/>

The trick to finding research when you use an academic database is limiting your search to find useful results. You can use quotation marks, asterisks, or boolean search terms (e.g., AND) to refine your search. For example, if you want to write an essay and describe various types of earthquakes, you will get different results if you use these different search terms:

funding for music education =	any articles that use the words <i>funding</i> , <i>for</i> , <i>music</i> , or <i>education</i>
"funding for music education" =	only articles that use the exact phrase <i>funding for music education</i>
funding AND music =	any articles that mention BOTH <i>funding</i> and <i>music</i>
fund* AND music* =	any articles that use the words <i>fund</i> or <i>funding</i> as well as <i>music</i> , <i>musical</i> , etc.

For more information and practice finding and understanding academic sources, check out the research tutorials at <https://ysearch.lib.byu.edu>.

Tip: Keeping Track of Sources

There are many different ways to keep track of your sources. For this exercise, you will practice using a table or spreadsheet.

1. Create a table in your word document or create a separate spreadsheet that looks like the one below.
2. In the first column, make a list of possible search terms you might use to find sources.
3. As you use the search terms, click on articles with titles that sound relevant.
4. Read only the abstract. If you need more information, the introduction and conclusion may be helpful at this stage.
5. If the article abstract sounds connected to your thesis, copy and paste the names of the article in the second column.
6. Add the name of the journal or website in the third column.
7. In the fourth column, you can make a note of what part of your outline the source would best support (ex. the first topic sentence, the opposite point of view, introducing a definition of the topic, etc).
8. Later, when you have time, you will read the article and add notes and any quotes you may want to use in the final column.

This is a helpful way to keep all of your outside information organized. It will be easier to create your reference page later and to add support from sources as you write your body paragraphs.

Search Term	Name of Article	Name of Journal/Website	Section of Essay I Think It Will Support	Notes and Quotes After Reading

Exercise 1: Find Sources

Using a table like the one below, find **THREE** sources to support the following thesis statement:

- There have been many different ways for which pollution has impacted society, some of those include health and the environment.

Search Term	Name of Article	Name of Journal/Website	Section of Essay I Think It Will Support

References:

BYU Library. (2022, July 6). *Finding books and print resources - step-by-step guide & research ...* guides.lib.byu.edu. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://guides.lib.byu.edu/c.php?g=216340&p=1428398>

Purdue OWL. (2022). *Apa formatting and style guide (7th edition)*. APA Formatting and Style Guide (7th Edition) - Purdue OWL® - Purdue University. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/index.html



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