

Research Writing: Trustworthy Sources

Consider the following advice regarding assessing the quality of your sources. Wayne Booth outlines a number of ways that you can tell whether a source is trustworthy or not: the following is adapted from *The Craft of Research* (77-80).

Your source should be reputable.

University presses are generally reputable sources, especially if the university is well-known. For web sources, you can always check the address bar of your web browser for the .edu (University) designation. Another good url designation to look for is .gov – this means that you are on a government website, which is a great place to find statistics and population information. If you are unsure about a source, you should either ask your librarian or professor for help or simply not include it.

Your source should be peer-reviewed.

Peer review is a process in which an article or book which is going to be published is evaluated by other experts in the field. Most university publications are peer-reviewed, as well as most academic journals. If you cannot determine whether a source has been peer-reviewed, you can often determine this by either researching the source online by Ulrichsweb (found under Research Databases on the library home page (<http://library.csuohio.edu/research/databases/index.html>)). Even easier, simply click the box for “Scholarly/Peer Reviewed” articles in an EBSCOhost database like Academic Search Complete or another database that provides that information, and your search will retrieve only peer-reviewed articles.

Your source should be current.

When searching for sources, try to think about how quickly the information you are writing about becomes obsolete. For example, if you were writing a paper about Martin Luther King, Jr., it would be acceptable to use sources even up to sixty years old. If you are writing a paper about consumer electronics, you will want to stay within a year, two at the maximum.

Your source should be unbiased.

While it is both important and interesting to talk about societal issues like gun control or stem cell research, bear in mind that many of the sources that talk about these issues may be biased in one direction or another. Some sources might make their bias clear via political affiliations –and sources that you find may misrepresent or omit information that is relevant to your essay.

If you are having trouble finding sources:

If you are having trouble finding sources to support your argument, it may be either that your subject matter is too obscure or that your argument is ill-founded. Try broadening the terms of (or reconsidering) your argument. Schedule an appointment with a librarian (<http://proxy.ulib.csuohio.edu:5679/services/librarians.html>), talk to or email your professor for help, or make an appointment with a tutor on campus at TASC or the Writing Center.