



The Writing Center at Bristol Community College

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Research Workshop on Evaluation of Sources

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Academic Research: Understanding the Process

What does it mean to research?

- The research process is a search for the truth about a particular issue in order to establish a conclusion, to come to a resolution, or to make a final decision.

What does the academic research process usually involve?

- A search for answers to a specific question or problem;
- Input, feedback and/or data taken from a variety of reliable sources;
- Collection of data, evidence and/or information in a systematic way.

Evaluation of Sources: Selection of Research Articles

Has any evidence been used to support any claims or opinions or points made in the article?

- How long is the article or document?
- How much of the text of the article provides examples, details or other data (graphs, pictures) to support statements or opinions?
- Does the article only skim the surface of the issue or does it cover the points discussed in a fairly comprehensive way?
- Have you examined closely the evidence used in this article?

What kinds of evidence have been used in the article?

- Does the article include first person accounts (primary sources)? (Primary sources would include people on the scene or those directly involved in the situations or issues discussed.)
- Is there more than one example, one perspective or one incident used to support any claims made? Have both sides or several perspectives of an issue been represented, especially with a highly controversial topic?
- Have statistics been used to clarify and support the claims or statements made?
- Have you evaluated the relevance and the source of the statistics?

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- **If the author has cited other individuals or organizations, what is their expertise in this field? Do they have credentials from respected institutions or organizations? What do you know about these organizations?**
- **Has evidence or data been taken from other sources in print (i.e. journals or books)? What do you know about these sources?**
- **Is the data current or dated appropriately enough to be effective?**
- **Has other data been gathered from reliable sources, organizations or people who have no obvious bias? Do any of these sources have anything to gain from data being slanted in a certain way?**
- **Is the presentation of evidence clear and logically supporting the claims?**

What do you know about the author?

- **Is there any biographical information about this writer or writers?**
- **What institutions or organizations have they been associated with?**
- **What education or experiences have they had that would help them write intelligently about the issues discussed in this article?**
- **Have they written about this topic or issue before?**
- **Are the authors considered experts in this particular field?**
- **Do the authors have anything to gain by presenting certain facts and excluding others? In other words, what might their bias be?**

What do you know about the publication?

- **Is the publication reputable in its field? Many journals are written by experts in specific fields, but some carry more weight than others. Often the more commercial advertising done in a particular journal, the less respected it is; however, asking those who work or teach in these disciplines can provide you with a better yardstick for assessing a journal's credibility.**
- **Who or what organization is publishing the article? Does this organization have any obvious bias?**
- **Who owns the publishing company or who is this publisher affiliated with?**
- **What is the date of publication of this source? Was this article a reprint from another source? If so, when was it first published?**

Note: *The questions presented here for assessing the credibility of an article are not easy ones to answer, but they should serve as a guide to evaluating what you find in print. Never trust something solely because it is in print. These guidelines should help you recognize the need to evaluate carefully the opinions, data and statements of anything that you read.*