



# **RESEARCH SOURCES**

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION**



THE  
UNWEEDDED GARDEN



# QUANTITY vs. QUALITY

- We live in what is frequently dubbed the “**Information Age,**”
- a **misleading** label
- that **falsely** suggests that all the data we are inundated with is accurate, precise, or correct –
  - as if the **quantity** of information is directly proportionate to the **quality** of information.

# QUANTITY vs. QUALITY

- Living in such times, we are bombarded with a barrage of information to the point of confusion and distraction,
- and, overwhelmed, we are left to wonder what is **reliable, credible, authentic, trustworthy, and truthful.**
- With astonishing, almost instantaneous, access to material at our fingertips (literally!),
  - we often find it hard to distinguish between **information, misinformation, and disinformation.**

# QUANTITY vs. QUALITY

- Thus, with so much “stuff” out there
  - (and you know what I mean by “stuff”),
- it has become necessary for **survival** and **success** –
  - **not just in school but in life!** –
- to develop the **keen proficiency in critically evaluating sources.**



# QUANTITY vs. QUALITY

- “Tis an **unweeded garden** / That grows to seed;  
things **rank** and **gross** in nature / Possess it merely”  
(Hamlet 1.2.135-137)
  - ... so what follows are some helpful hints to help us effectively **hack** our way through it.



THE  
WEEDING PROCESS

# WHERE TO BEGIN

- “GOOGLE” is NOT a synonym for “RESEARCH”:
  - Why go looking for *weeds* to plant in your garden?
  - True, some valuable sources are available on the general Internet
  - BUT
  - Why not limit your time & energy by looking in the place where you “know” there are *flowers*
    - ANALOGY: You can go to Wal-Mart, wander aimlessly through the aisles & fight the crowds & you just might find what need OR you can directly to Jo-An Fabric & know they’ll have exactly what you’re looking for



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Recognize the TYPES of Sources:

## (1) SCHOLARLY

- journals; database articles; prof. publications
- “scholarly”:
  - academic, erudite, intellectual, researched, documented
  - by scholars, professionals in the field
  - database articles, esp. those that have been “peer-edited”
- \*refers to works of other scholars in works cited, footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, references
- names the author and gives her/his *credentials*
- includes *notes, references, bibliography*
- deals with serious issue *in depth*
- appears in journals *without* colorful ads or pictures



USE  
THESE!

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Recognize the TYPES of Sources:

- (2) for NON-SPECIALISTS but SERIOUS

- *Atlantic Monthly; encyclopedias*

- (3) GENERAL AUDIENCE

- *Newsweek, Time*

- (4) DUBIOUS SOURCES

- *Star, Wikipedia, about.com, blogs*

A large yellow arrow pointing to the left, with the text 'DO NOT USE!' written in red inside the arrow's shaft.

**DO NOT USE!**

# (1) AUTHOR

- look for the following of the given author(s)
  - (be suspicious if no author is given)
  - (BUT don't presume this automatically means a poor source)
- Is the author a **noted, recognized name *in the field***?
- Has the author been **quoted by other sources**?
- Is your source (the article/book) related to her/his ***field of expertise***?





# (1) AUTHOR

- DETERMINE the WRITER'S

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purpose</li><li>• Audience</li><li>• Tone</li><li>• Language</li><li>• Accuracy</li><li>• Bias, Agenda</li><li>• Quality of Writing</li><li>• Use of Logos, Pathos, Ethos</li><li>• *Coverage, depth of analysis</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Professional Reputation</li><li>Credentials</li><li>Education</li><li>Field of Expertise</li><li>Professional Experience</li><li>Publications</li><li>Publisher of Work</li><li>Professional Affiliations</li><li>Objectivity, impartiality</li></ul> |
|--|---|

## (2) PUBLICATION DATE

- note the **copyright or publication date**
- note the date of the **latest revision** (of Web site)
- **EDITION:**
  - **later editions**
    - indicate revisions, corrections, updates
  - **multiple editions**
    - suggest reliability



## (2) PUBLICATION DATE

- SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY:

- since these fields are frequently updated,
- sources should be **recent**
  - (think cell phones from the 1990s)

- HISTORY:

- depending if you need **secondary** or **primary** source information
- **recent** (new understanding, revisions, contemporary views )
- **remote** (near the original event, initial interpretations or reactions)



## (3) PUBLISHER

- note the type of material it usually publishes
  - reputation
  - affiliations
  - in the field (related to *your* topic)
- a university press (“UP”) suggests scholarly work
- \*non sequitur:
  - “it does not follow” that a reputable publisher
  - guarantees quality, reliability of the source

## (3) PUBLISHER

- DETERMINE the PUBLISHER'S:

- Purpose
- Audience
- Tone
- Language
- Accuracy
- Bias, Agenda
- Ads (#, kinds of products)

- Professional Reputation
- Quality of Writing
- Use of Logos, Pathos, Ethos
- Coverage, depth of analysis

# (4) BIBLIOGRAPHY

- reliable, scholarly works will include a **bibliography, Works Cited or Consulted page, references**
- note **what type of research** has been performed by the author (types of sources)
  - **credible sources = credible information**
  - **suggests other sources for you to consider**
  - **can point you in other directions**





# (5) CONTENT

- Intended Audience:

- presumed educational level?
  - elementary, technical, or advanced
- specialized?
- scholarly?
- public or popular?



# (5) CONTENT

- Support-Sources:
- (Critical Reading)
  - Analyze the writer's use of LOGOS, PATHOS, ETHOS.
  - Is the support/grounds *adequate, accurate, relevant*?
  - What is the *timeliness* of the views?
  - Does the writer support the claim with *facts, statistics* or with *opinions, inferences, assumptions*?
  - *Truthfulness* or *propaganda, misinformation, lies, half-truths*?
  - Is the evidence questionable or *researched*?
  - Are there *errors, oversights, omissions*?
  - Is there evidence of *logical fallacies* –
    - *overgeneralizations, circular reasoning, non sequitur, false dilemma, ad hominem*
  - Is there an obvious *bias* or *conflict of interest*?
  - Are the sources *primary* or *secondary*?

# (5) CONTENT

- PRIMARY vs. SECONDARY Sources:

| <u>PRIMARY SOURCES</u>   | <u>SECONDARY SOURCES</u>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• raw material</li><li>• court cases &amp; decisions, government documents, journals, diaries</li><li>• first-hand accounts (eye-witness testimony)</li><li>• contemporary news coverage</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• based on primary sources</li><li>• analyses of primary sources</li><li>• second-hand information</li><li>• books, journal articles, encyclopedia articles about the primary event</li></ul> |



# (5) CONTENT

- Coverage:

- Does the writer give an *in-depth, detailed account*
  - *all sides to the issue*
  - *multiple perspectives*
  - *full history, background*
  - *suggestions, recommendations*
- or just a  *cursory overview*?



# (5) CONTENT

- Tone:

- *concerned, serious, mature* OR *condescending, arrogant, flippant, sarcastic, snarky*
- Does the writer employ *loaded language, ad misericordiam, ad hominem, ad populum*?

- POV:

- Does the writer remain **OBJECTIVE** and *impartial*,
- or does s/he become *subjective* and *argumentative*?



# (5) CONTENT

- Book Reviews:

- What have others *in the field* remarked regarding your source book?
  - How was it received by peers?
- Consult **book reviews** of your source:
  - Book Review Index
  - Book Review Digest
  - Periodical Abstracts







THE  
TOOL SHED

# INFO NEEDED for ANALYSIS

- PRINT BOOK:

- author(s), editor, translator
- title and subtitle
- publication info (publisher, year)
- volume or edition numbers (if necessary)
- call number

# INFO NEEDED for ANALYSIS

- PRINT ARTICLE:

- author(s), editor, translator
- title and subtitle
- name of periodical
- publication info
  - o volume number, issue number, date
  - o inclusive page numbers of article



# INFO NEEDED for ANALYSIS

- ELECTRONIC SOURCES:

- author(s), editor, translator
- title and subtitle
- any print publication info (like book)
- name & full URL of the site
- electronic publication info
  - CD-rom & version #, volume or issue number of online magazine
- compiler of Web page or CD-rom
- dates of post/update & your access URL
- save to disk, bookmark, e-mail to yourself, or print copy



# SUMMARY

# “Credible, Reliable”

- AUTHOR & PUBLICATION:

- background =

- expert *in field*, education, experience, reputation among peers, quality writing, quality research, no bias/agenda

- analysis =

- in-depth, serious, objective, accurate, proof read (*for grammar & facts*)

- multiple sides, different perspectives, researched

- facts vs. opinions, updated/revised, peer-reviewed,

- tone =

- concerned, serious, no agenda