Lesson Proper for Week 10

FINDING RELIABLE SOURCES

Several resources are readily at hand to guide you in finding reliable sources.

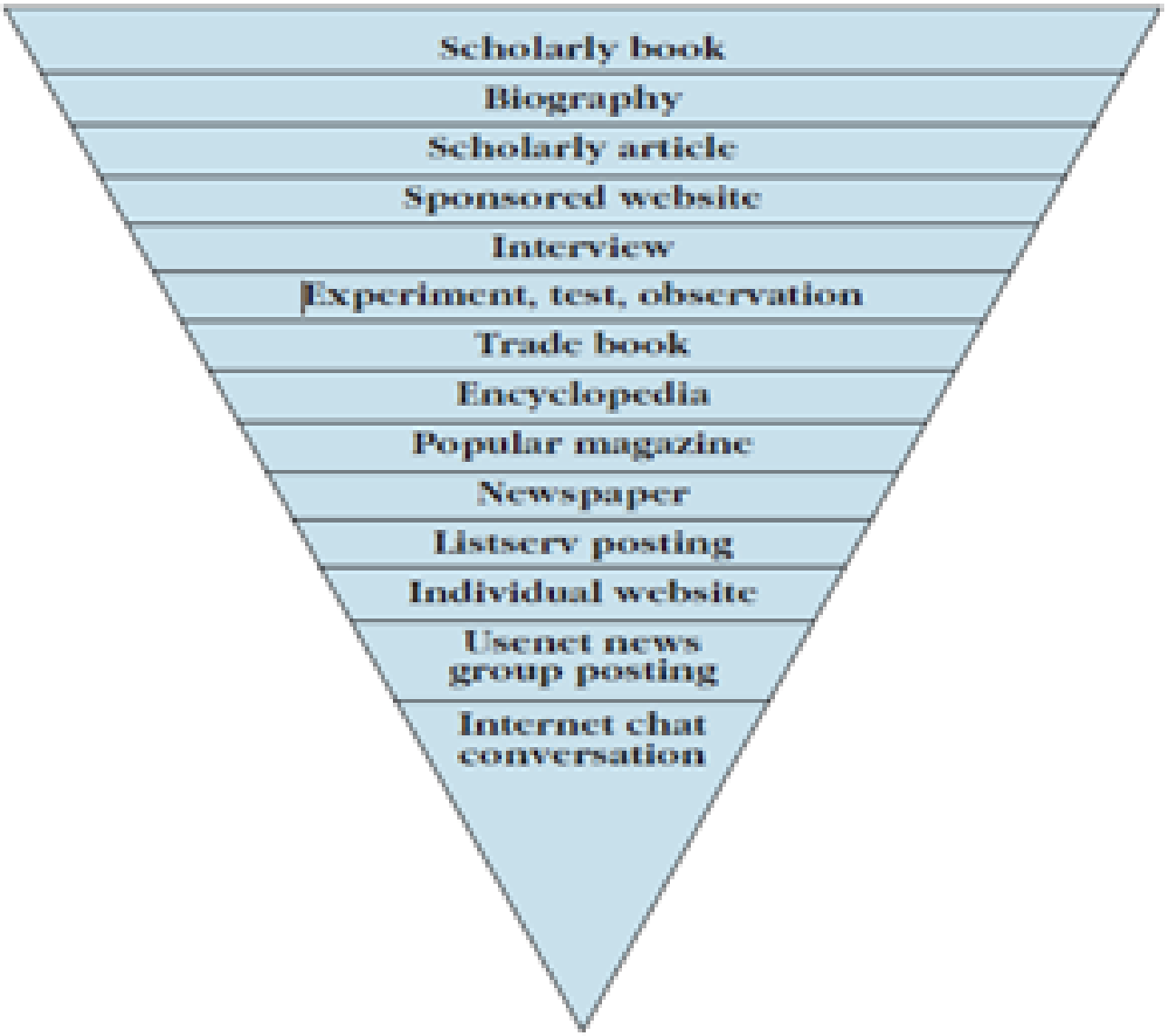
*Your **instructors**.* Do not hesitate to ask your instructor for help in finding sources. Instructors know the field, know the best writers, and can provide a brief list to get you started.

***Librarians**.* Nobody knows the resources of the library like the professionals. They are evaluated on how well they meet your needs. If you ask for help, they will often walk into the stacks with you to find the appropriate reference books or relevant journal articles.

***The library**.* The college library provides the scholarly sources—the best books, certainly, but also the appropriate databases and the important journals—in your field of study. The library databases are grounded in scholarship and, in general, they are not available to the general public on the Web.

***The date**.* Try to use recent sources. A book may appear germane to your work, but if its copyright date is 1975, the content has probably been replaced by recent research and current developments. Scientific and technical topics *always* require up-to-date research.

***Choices**.* An inverted pyramid shows you a progression from excellent sources to less reliable sources. The pyramid chart does not ask you to dismiss items at the bottom, but it indicates that sources at the top are generally more reliable and therefore preferred.



Scholarly Book

A college library is a repository for scholarly books—technical and scientific works, doctoral dissertations, publications of university presses, and textbooks. These sources offer in-depth discussions and careful documentation of the evidence.

Biography

The librarian can help you find an appropriate printed biography from among the thousands available. Short biographies appear in such works as *Contemporary Authors, American National Biography,* and *Who's Who in Philosophy.* Longer critical biographies are devoted to the life of one person, such as Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde,* a study of the Irish poet and playwright, and Alf Mapp's *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity,* which interprets the life and times of the former president. To find a critical biography, use the electronic book catalog at the library. You can also find biographies online. Most notable figures have several websites devoted to them that include articles by and about them.

Refer to biography for these reasons:

1. To verify the standing and reputation of somebody you want to paraphrase or quote in your paper.
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2. To provide biographical details in your introduction. For example, the primary topic may be Carl Jung's psychological theories of the unconscious, but information about Jung's career might be appropriate in the paper.

3. To discuss a creative writer's life in relation to his or her work. That is, Jamaica Kincaid's personal life may shed some light on your reading of her stories or novels.

Scholarly Article

A scholarly article usually appears in a journal you access through the library's databases. With a journal article, you may feel confident in its authenticity because the authors of journal articles write for academic honor, they document all sources, and they publish through university presses and academic organizations that use a jury to judge an article before its publication. Thus, a journal article about child abuse found in *Child Development* or in *Journal of Marriage and Family* should be reliable, but an article about child abuse in a popular magazine may be less reliable in its facts and opinions. Usually, but not in every case, you can identify a journal in these ways:

1. The journal does not have a colorful cover; in fact, the table of contents is often displayed on the cover.

2. No colorful drawings or photography introduce each journal article, just a title and the name of the author(s).

3. The word *journal* often appears in the title (e.g., *American Journal of Sociology*).

4. The yearly issues of a journal are bound into a book.

5. Usually, the pages of a journal are numbered continuously through all issues for a year (unlike magazines, which are paged anew with each issue).

Sponsored Website

The Internet supplies both excellent information and some that is questionable in value. You must make judgments about the validity of these materials. Ask yourself a few questions about any article from a website:

· Is it appropriate to my work?

· Is it reliable and authoritative?

· Is it sponsored by an institution or organization?

Consult section 4b for a set of guidelines.

Interview

Interviews with knowledgeable people provide excellent information for a research paper. Whether conducted in person or by e-mail, the interview brings a personal, expert perspective to your work. The key element, of course, is the expertise of the person.

Experiment, Test, or Observation

Gathering your own data for research is a staple in many fields, especially the sciences. An experiment will bring

Gathering your own data for research is a staple in many fields, especially the sciences. An experiment will bring primary evidence to your paper as you explain your hypothesis, give the test results, and discuss the implications of your findings.

Trade Book

CNC Robotics: Build Your Own Workshop Bot and *A Field Guide to Industrial Landscapes* are typical titles of nonfiction trade books found in bookstores and some public libraries, but not usually in a college library. Designed for commercial consumption, trade books seldom treat with depth a scholarly subject. Trade books have specific targets—the cook, the gardener, the antique dealer. In addition, trade books, in general, receive no rigorous prepublication scrutiny like scholarly books and textbooks do.

Encyclopedia

By design, encyclopedias contain brief surveys of well-known persons, events, places, and accomplishments. They will serve you well during preliminary investigation, but most instructors prefer that you go beyond encyclopedias in order to cite from scholarly books and journal articles. Encyclopedias seldom have the critical perspective you can gain from books and journal articles.

Magazine

Like trade books, magazines have a targeted audience—young women, wrestling fans, computer connoisseurs, travelers. The articles are written rather quickly and seldom face critical review by a panel of experts. Therefore, exercise caution when reading a popular commercial magazine.

However, some magazines target an intellectual audience and thereby have a superior quality with academic merit; these include *Atlantic Monthly, Scientific Review, Astronomy, Smithsonian, Discover, Harper's,* and the *New Yorker.* In general, college libraries house the intellectual magazines, but they can also be found at most chain bookstores.

Newspaper

Some newspaper articles are not carefully researched or peer reviewed, but major newspapers such as the *New York Times,* the *Los Angeles Times,* and the *Wall Street Journal* offer carefully fact-checked information and rigorously researched stories. Generally, newspapers offer an excellent source of information, especially of local information that may not be found elsewhere.

Listserv

E-mail information via listserv deserves consideration when it focuses on an academic issue, such as British

E-mail information via listserv deserves consideration when it focuses on an academic issue, such as British Romantic literature or, more specifically, the poetry of Robert Browning. In many cases, listservs originate from a college or scholarly organization. In fact, many instructors establish their own listserv sites for individual classes. Online courses usually feature a listserv site for exchange of ideas and peer review. These listservs can be a great way to seek out possible topics and learn what literature teachers or sociologists are talking about these days. *Caution:* Use the listserv to generate ideas, not as a source for facts to use in quotations.

Individual Website

A person's home page provides a publication medium for anybody who presumes to a knowledge he or she does or does not possess. You can't avoid home pages because they pop up on search engines, but you *can* approach them with caution. For example, one student, investigating the topic "fad diets," searched the Web, only to find mostly commercial sites that were blatant in their commercial attempts to sell something and home pages that described personal battles with weight loss. Caution is vital.

Usenet

Usenet newsgroups post information on a site. Like call-in radio shows, they invite opinions from a vast cross section of people, some reliable and some not. In most cases, participants employ an anonymous username, rendering their ideas useless for a documented paper.

Internet Chat Conversations

Chat rooms have almost no value for academic research. In most cases, you don't even know who you are chatting with, and the conversations are seldom about scholarly issues.

SELECTING A MIX OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

Primary sources include novels, speeches, eyewitness accounts, interviews, letters, autobiographies, and the results of original research. Feel free to quote often from a primary source if it has direct relevance to your discussion. If you examine a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, you must quote the poem. If you examine President Barack Obama's domestic policies on health care, you must quote from White House documents.

Secondary sources are writings *about* the primary sources, *about* an author, or *about* somebody's accomplishments. Examples of secondary sources are a report on a presidential speech, a review of new scientific findings, and an analysis of a poem. A biography provides a secondhand view of the life of a notable person. A history book interprets events. These evaluations, analyses, or interpretations provide ways of looking at primary works, events, and lives.

Do not quote liberally from secondary sources. Be selective. Use a well-worded sentence, not the entire paragraph. Incorporate a key phrase into your text, not eight or nine lines. The subject area of a research paper determines in part the nature of the source materials. Use the chart on the next page as a guide.

EVALUATING SOURCES

Evaluating the Key Parts of an Article

Look closely at these parts of any article that looks promising:

1. The **title**. Look for the words that have relevance to your topic before you start reading the article. For example, "Children and Parents" may look ideal for child abuse research until you read the subtitle: "Children and Parents: Growing Up in New Guinea."

2. An **abstract**. Reading an abstract is the best way to ascertain if an essay or a book will serve your specific needs. Some are available at the beginning of printed articles; others are provided by abstracting services (e.g., *Psychological Abstracts*). Most articles found through the library's databases will feature an abstract that you should read before printing or downloading the entire article. Save a tree, read before printing.

3. The **opening paragraphs**. If the opening of an article shows no relevance to your study, abandon it.

4. The **topic sentence** of each paragraph of the body. These first sentences, even if you scan them hastily, will give you a digest of the author's main points.

5. The **closing paragraph(s)**. If the opening of an article seems promising, skim the closing for relevance.

6. **Author credits**. Learn something about the credentials of the writer. Magazine articles often provide brief biographical profiles of authors. Journal articles and Internet home pages generally include the author's academic affiliation and credentials.

Read an entire article only if a quick survey encourages you to further investigation. Student Joe Matthews, an environmental engineering major, scanned an article for his paper on global warming. Figure 8.1 shows how he wrote marginal notes and comments that were germane to his study.

Evaluating the Key Parts of a Book

A book requires you to survey several items beyond those listed previously for articles:

1. The **table of contents**. A book's table of contents may reveal chapters that pertain to your topic. Often, only one chapter is useful. For example, Richard Ellmann's book *Oscar Wilde* devotes one chapter,

1. "The Age of Dorian," to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* If your research focuses on this novel, then th chapter, not the entire book, will demand your attention.

2. The **book jacket**, if one is available. For example, the jacket to Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde* says: Ellmann's

2. The **book jacket**, if one is available. For example, the jacket to Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde* says: Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde* has been almost twenty years in the work, and it will stand, like his universally admired *James Joyce,* as the definitive life. The book's emotional resonance, its riches of authentic color and conversation, and the subtlety of its critical illuminations give dazzling life to this portrait of the complex

Evaluating the Key Parts of an Internet Article

1. The home page, if there is one. Prefer sites sponsored by universities and professional organizations. You may have to truncate the URL to find the home page where such information is featured.

2. Look for hypertext links to other sites whose quality can again be determined by the domain tags *.edu, .org,* or *.gov.* be wary of sites that have the tag *.com.*

OUTLINING A SOURCE

You can frame an outline to capture an author's primary themes by listing statements that reveal the major issues and any supporting ideas.

Summarizing a Source

A summary condenses into a brief note the general nature of a source. Writing a summary forces you to grasp the essence of the material. You might even use it in your paper with your evaluation and comments. The summary could serve as the heart of an annotated bibliography, which is a citation with a summary attached.

CHECKLIST

Responding to a Source

· Read and make marginal notes on your sources.

· Search out scholarly materials—books and journals—by accessing your college library's resources. Do not depend entirely on the Internet.

· If appropriate, use a mix of quotations from primary sources, such as a novel, as well as paraphrases and quotations from secondary sources.

· Assess the nature of the source for any bias it might contain.

· Read and highlight the key parts of the source, whether it is an article, book, or Internet site.

· Outline key ideas to identify the issues.

· Write a summary that captures the essence of the article.

Preparing an Annotated Bibliography

An ***annotation*** is a summary of the contents of a book or article. A *bibliography* is a list of sources on a selected

An ***annotation*** is a summary of the contents of a book or article. A *bibliography* is a list of sources on a selected topic. Thus, an annotated bibliography does two important things: (1) It gives a bibliographic list of a selection of sources; and (2) it summarizes the contents of each book or article. Writing an annotated bibliography may at first appear to be busywork, but it will help you evaluate the strength of your sources.

Following are the characteristics for four forms of annotated bibliographies:

· **Indicative** Defines the scope of the source, lists the significant topics included, and tells what the source is about.

· **Informative/Summative** Summarizes the source. To write it, begin by writing the thesis before developing it with the argument or hypothesis.

· **Evaluative** Weighs the strengths and weaknesses of the source to gauge its relevance and usefulness with advancing your thesis.

· **Combination** Most annotated bibliographies follow this form by using one or two sentences to summarize or describe content and one or two sentences providing an evaluation.

The annotated bibliography that follows summarizes a selection of sources on the topic of media ethics.

Preparing a Review of the Literature on a Topic

The *review of literature* presents a set of summaries in essay form for two purposes:

1. It helps you investigate the topic because it forces you to examine and then describe how each source addresses the problem.

2. It organizes and classifies the sources in some reasonable manner for the benefit of the reader.

Thus, you should relate each source to your central subject, and you should group the sources according to their support of your thesis. For example, the brief review that follows explores the literature on the subject of media ethics. It classifies the sources under a progression of headings: the issues, the causes, the consequences, and possible solutions.

◄ Preliminary Activity for Week 10

Jump to...

Analysis, Application, and Exploration for Week 10 ►

Navigation

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2nd Semester Enrollment

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