

Part A Understanding your reading

Article extract

The results of our study demonstrated that in the general Slovenian adolescent population, some of the reasons for using DS were clearly associated with the extent of PA [physical activity]. In contrast to these results, the only similarly conducted study performed until now in young adults³⁸ revealed no effects of exercise level on the reasons for using DS.

The current study demonstrated that in the general Slovenian adolescent population, males more strongly emphasized purportedly sports performance-enhancing effects of DS, whereas females were more concerned with preventing of illness and disease. This was true for both nonathletic and athletic adolescents. This was in accordance with other qualitative⁴ and quantitative studies.^{18,19,22} Of those studies, only 9 papers were found that reported percentages of adolescents/young adults, who stated specific reasons for using DS.

Adapted extract from: Kotnik, K., Jurak, G., Starc G. and Golja, P. (2017) 'Faster, Stronger, Healthier: Adolescent-Stated Reasons for Dietary Supplementation', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour* 49(10), p.821.

What is a 'reliable' source?

A reliable source is one where the information is as correct and complete as possible.

- **Named sources** can be assessed for credibility more effectively than anonymous ones because the trustworthiness of a source depends heavily on who has written it. This is important to remember with regard to website material; if you don't know the person or organisation who wrote the information on the website, you can't use it for academic work.
- **Checked sources** (also called peer-reviewed sources) will be more reliable than those that have not been checked. These are sources that have been assessed by experts in the field before being published (see 'academic and scholarly sources' below).
- **Non-biased sources** will be more reliable than more biased ones. For example, material published by political organisations might be biased, because the information will be manipulated and presented in a way that best suits the author's own purposes. Bear in mind, however, that no source can be entirely non-biased, and that even the authors of academic journal articles are trying to persuade you to a particular point of view, and so may manipulate ideas and facts slightly to suit their own viewpoint.
- **Current sources** are more reliable than older ones, simply because they *are* more up to date. You may want to read older sources that are key texts or to build up

your knowledge, but for most topics you will also need current material. Always check online sources to see when they were last updated.

- **Primary sources** will be more reliable than secondary material. Authors of secondary sources might intentionally or unintentionally report the primary material incorrectly or in a biased way. In reality, it is not always possible or necessary to use only primary sources, but your tutor will expect you to read key primary material.

Top tip

Although the above holds true for the types of sources you will most commonly need for your assignments, you do need to think about what 'reliable' means for the type of information you are looking for. If, for example, your essay is about opinions in the media, then newspapers and television programmes will be reliable sources for this particular type of information, even though these sources may not be checked by experts and will be biased. Similarly, if you are writing about the views of different political organisations, then their leaflets and websites will provide reliable information on what these views are, even though such information may not be balanced or reliable in the general sense of the word.



What is an 'academic' or 'scholarly' source?

When tutors talk about academic or scholarly sources, they usually mean ones that have been peer reviewed, in other words, checked by an expert before publication. Most books undergo this peer review as part of the publishing process, and articles published by an 'academic', 'scholarly' or 'peer-reviewed' journal will have been sent to experts for review and checking. Tutors often use the terms *academic*, *authoritative*, *reliable*, *reputable*, *scholarly* or just *good* interchangeably to mean sources that have been checked in some way, or at least written by a subject professional (although *scholarly* can also just mean well written and researched).

Note that peer review is not the same thing as a film or book review. Book reviews are pieces in which the author gives their personal opinion, and include the book and article reviews commonly found towards the end of academic journals.

Is a reliable source the same thing as an academic one?

Although tutors sometimes use these terms to mean the same thing, you will see from the explanations above that an academic source is usually a reliable one, but that a reliable source is *not* always an academic one, as in the example of using a newspaper as a source of information on opinions in the media.