

Activity: Pre-evaluating Sources

In this activity, you will walk through the steps involved in pre-evaluating sources for academic research.

Directions: Select two sources for a topic of your choice by considering no fewer than five sources from a key-word search. List citations for your search results, then draft a detailed explanation of your step-by-step approach for selecting the two best sources for this research.

Your response should include:

- A description of the topic of your choice
- A list of at least five sources with citations from a keyword search
- A short explanation of your step-by-step approach for selecting the two best sources for this research

Sample response

My topic is the women who fought in the U.S. Civil War. After searching for information on this topic, I had a list of five preliminary sources.

Women Soldiers of the Civil War. DeAnne Blanton. Prologue, Spring 1993, Vol. 25, No. 1. <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1993/spring/women-in-the-civil-war-1.html> Women on the Civil War Battlefield by Richard H. Hall. Review by: Joan E. Cashin. The Journal of Military History, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Oct., 2007) , pp. 1245-1246. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30052817> Thomas E. Rodgers. Hoosier Women and the Civil War Home Front. Indiana Magazine of History, Vol. 97, No. 2 (June 2001), pp. 105-128. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27792305> Private Albert Cashier as Regarded by His/Her Comrades. Rodney O. Davis. Illinois Historical Journal, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Summer, 1989) , pp. 108-112. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40192475> All is Fair: Women and the American Civil War. Janelle Collett. <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/remember/rtl6.htm>

My first step was to look at all of my sources for authority and bias. I could tell fairly quickly that sources 2, 3, and 4 all seem to have good authority. They are articles published in scholarly journals, peer-reviewed, and collected in a scholarly database. Sources 2 and 3 are published by university presses, which I know is a good indicator of scholarly content.

For source 1, I had to look a little harder, since I was not familiar with the publication and did not find it using a database. I performed a web search for the author's name and learned that she is a military archivist who has published a book about women who

fought in the Civil War. The journal, Prologue, is published by the National Archives and Records Administration (a government agency). The tone of the article is scholarly, and it uses primary source material and includes a list of scholarly sources. Based on these observations, I decided that source 2 is an authoritative and unbiased source.

Finally, I looked at source 5. No information is given about the author's background or credentials, and the publisher is a non-scholarly website that doesn't seem to be affiliated with any well-known institution. It's also difficult to tell whether this source is biased. There's no information about the publication process, so I don't know whether this article has been peer-reviewed or even edited. This might be a fine article, but it doesn't have some important indicators of scholarly work, so I decided to exclude it as a source.

My next step was to examine the content of the four remaining articles. They all use language, tone, and style appropriate to scholarly publishing. However, I noticed at this point that the purpose of article 2 is to review a book on my topic, not to provide new information on the topic itself. I decided to exclude it, since it is likely not the best source to give information on my topic.

This left me with sources 1, 3, and 4 — all authoritative, unbiased, and scholarly articles. I noticed that source 3, although it is an appropriate source for academic research, isn't a great fit for my search. It's about the roles of women on the home front and I'm looking for information about women in battle. So I selected sources 1 and 4 as my final results.