

From OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab

When You Begin to Find Sources for Research

There are a lot of articles, encyclopedias, and books in existence. Where can you begin to find the material *you* need for your topic?

- **Talk with your librarian:** Librarians aren't at your school simply to put books away. They are trained to help you find sources and information, no matter what your topic is.
- **Search through potential books:** Don't worry; you don't need to read the *entire* book to find information in it. Learn how to use the table of contents in books to find exactly what you are looking for. Also, with many books, reading the first sentence of each paragraph can give you an idea of what that paragraph is about. If the first sentence of the paragraph applies to your topic, then continue reading the rest of that paragraph.
- **Search online:** The Internet is filled with tons of information, some of which can be helpful for your research papers.
- **Search online journals (if available):** Online journals are collections of scholarly articles written by some of the top scholars in different academic fields. Although the language might be difficult at times, journal articles can be very credible and helpful. Ask your librarian if you have access to online journals.
- **Wikipedia (as a starting point only):** Although Wikipedia has gained a bad reputation in recent years, much of the information on it is accurate and reliable. However, you should only use this information as a starting point. With most Wikipedia entries, writers share the sources used for the information. Try to find the actual sources used to create the Wikipedia article. Then, if that source is useful to you and it is credible, use it!

Tracing Backward to Find Sources

Once you find a source that works well for your topic, see if you can find a "Works Cited" page or information about what sources influenced the author of your particular source. **Tracing backward** like this can give you a wealth of information. Think of it as someone handing you a list of sources that might work very well with your paper topic.

Evaluating Sources

Be sure that the sources you use are credible. This means that you must find good sources with information you can trust. But how do you know if you can trust a source? Here are some things to look for:

Author

- **Avoid sources with no author.** If you find a source with no author, you often cannot know whether or not that writing can be trusted. This is especially true with online sources.
- **Look for authors who are experts in their fields.** Find authors who have higher education or who have worked in their field for a while. Avoid choosing a source by a random author who has no credentials.

Date of Source

- **Check to see when the source was published.** If you are writing on a topic in which the information has changed in recent years (especially scientific topics), the best sources might be the most recent sources.

Evidence

- **Look for sources that use evidence or other experts to back up their claims.** Avoid sources that simply say an opinion without proving it.

Organization/Publishers

- **Find sources that have trustworthy publishers or organizations behind them.** Do not use sources from sites like Ask.com or Yahoo Answers, since there is no professional organization or publisher backing up the writers' claims.

Works Cited

The Purdue OWL Family of Sites. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2008, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl. Accessed 9 March 2017.