Research and Evaluating Information sources

- English III

- *Adapted from the OWL at Purdue University*

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Research: Where do I begin?

- **Summary:** We live in an age overflowing with sources of information. With so many information sources at our fingertips, knowing where to start, sorting through it all and finding what we want can be overwhelming! This PowerPoint provides answers to the following research-related questions:

- Where do I begin?
- Where should I look for information?
- What types of sources are available?
- How do I evaluate the information I find?

Online vs. Print

- An important distinction when doing research is the difference between traditional publications and Internet resources. The Internet may be the most convenient place to begin your research, but it is not always the best.
- **Internet Sources:** Anything published exclusively online in a variety of digital formats. Material includes: web pages, PDF documents, ebooks, multimedia.
- **Traditional Publications:** This includes anything that has been published in print form and is widely available at libraries and bookstores. Material includes: books, textbooks, newspapers, popular and scholarly journals, and magazines.
- With the advent of new technologies, many traditional resources are now available online (including newspaper articles, magazines, book chapters, and journal articles).

Types of Sources

- The amount of information can be overwhelming and confusing. This section provides a list of common types of sources and what information you can discover from each.

Information Sources

- **Books & Textbooks:** Books come in a multitude of topics. Because of the time it takes to publish a book, books usually contain more dated information than will be found in journals and newspapers.

- **Newspapers:** Predominately covering the latest events and trends, newspapers contain very up-to-date information. Newspapers report both information that is factual in nature and also share opinions. Generally, however, they will not take a "big picture" approach or contain information about larger trends.

- **Academic and Trade Journals:** Academic and trade journals are where to find the most up-to-date information and research in industry, business, and academia. Journal articles come in several forms, including literature reviews which overview about current and past research, articles on theories and history, or articles on specific processes or research.

Information Sources

- **Government Reports and Legal Documents:** The government releases information intended for its own use or for public use. These types of documents can be an excellent source of information. An example of a government report is the U.S. Census data. Most government reports and legal documents can now be accessed online.
- **Press Releases and Advertising:** Companies and special interest groups produce texts to help persuade readers to act in some way or inform the public about some new development
- **Flyers, Pamphlets, Leaflets:** While some flyers or pamphlets are created by reputable sources, because of the ease in which they are created, many less-than-reputable sources also produce these. They are useful for quick reference or very general information.
- **Multimedia:** Printed material is certainly not the only option for finding research. Also consider media sources such as radio and television broadcasts, interactive talks, and public meetings.

Internet-Only Sources

- **Websites:** Most of the information on the Internet is distributed via websites. Websites vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources.
- **Weblogs / Blogs:** A rather recent development in web technology, weblogs or blogs are a type of interactive journal where writers post and readers respond. They vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources. For example, many prestigious journalists and public figures may have blogs, which may be more credible of a blog than most.
- **Message boards, discussion lists, and chat rooms:** Discussion lists, chat rooms, and message boards exist for all kinds of disciplines both in and outside of the university. However, plenty of boards exist that are rather unhelpful and poorly researched.
- **Multimedia:** The Internet has a multitude of multimedia resources including online broadcasts and news, images, audio files, and interactive websites.

Primary Research

- **Interviews:** A conversation between two or more people in which one person (the interviewer) asks a series of questions to another person or persons (the interviewee).

- **Surveys & Questionnaires:** A process of gathering specific information from people in a systematic way with a set series of questions. Survey questions usually have pre-specified or short responses.

- *These methods are a lot more work than they might seem!!!*

- *If you want to use primary research, you must have it approved by Ms. Herman*

Evaluating Sources: Overview

- The world is full of information to be found-- however, not all of it is valid, useful, or accurate. Evaluating sources of information that you are considering using in your writing is an important step in any research activity.

- The quantity of information available is so staggering that we cannot know everything about a subject. For example, it's estimated that anyone attempting to research what's known about depression would have to read over 100,000 studies on the subject. And there's the problem of trying to decide which studies have produced reliable results.

Evaluating Sources: Overview
continued

- Evaluating sources is an important skill. It's been called an art as well as work--much of which is detective work. You have to decide where to look, what clues to search for, and what to accept. You may be overwhelmed with too much information or too little. The temptation is to accept whatever you find. But don't be tempted. Learning how to evaluate effectively is a skill you need both for your course papers and your life.

How do you evaluate sources?

- After you have asked yourself some questions about the source and determined that it's worth your time to find and read the source, you can evaluate the material in the source as you read through it.

Evaluating Sources

- Check for a list of references or other citations that look as if they will lead you to related material that would be good sources.
- Try to determine if the content of the source is fact, opinion, or propaganda. If you think the source is offering facts, are the sources for those facts clearly indicated?
- Is the language objective or emotional?

Evaluating Sources

- Are there broad generalizations that overstate or oversimplify the matter?
- How timely is the source? Is the source 20 years out of date? Some information becomes dated when new research is available, but other older sources of information can be quite sound 50 or 100 years later.

Evaluating Sources

- Do some cross-checking. Can you find some of the same information given elsewhere?
- How credible is the author? If the document is anonymous, what do you know about the organization?
- Are arguments very one-sided with no acknowledgement of other viewpoints?

Evaluating Print vs. Internet Sources

■ With the advent of the World Wide Web, we are seeing a massive influx of digital texts and sources. Understanding the difference between what you can find on the web and what you can find in more traditional print sources is key.

■ Some sources such as journal or newspaper articles can be found in both print and digital format. However, much of what is found on the Internet does not have a print equivalent, and hence, has low or no quality standards for publication. Understanding the difference between the types of resources available will help you evaluate what you find.

Print vs. Internet

Publication Process

■ **Print Sources:** Traditional print sources go through an extensive publication process that includes editing and article review. The process has fact-checkers, multiple reviewers, and editors to ensure quality of publication.

■ **Internet Sources:** Anyone with a computer and access to the Internet can publish a website or electronic document. Most web documents do not have editors, fact-checkers, or other types of reviewers.

Print vs. Internet

Authorship and Affiliations

- **Print Sources:** Print sources clearly indicate who the author is, what organization(s) he or she is affiliated with, and when his or her work was published.

- **Internet Sources:** Authorship and affiliations are difficult to determine on the Internet. Some sites may have author and sponsorship listed, but many do not.

Print vs. Internet

Publication Information

- **Print Sources:** Publication information such as date of publication, publisher, author, and editor are always clearly listed in print publications.

- **Internet Sources:** Dates of publication and timeliness of information are questionable on the internet. Dates listed on websites could be the date posted, date updated, or a date may not be listed at all.

Your paper:

- What sources will be best for you to use for research?