



Academic Support Center
Writing Center

Reliable and Unreliable Sources

Resource: “Internet Research Tips” by Grace Fleming

Whenever sources must be used for writing academic papers, such as research papers, reliable sources must be used to validate or support your ideas. Some sources are considered as reliable because they have been written by people who are experts in the field. On the other hand, some sources, such as Wikipedia, are not reliable because the authors may not have a thorough knowledge or full understanding of a topic.

Below are two lists of sources that are considered as reliable and unreliable:

List of reliable sources – print and online:

- books – authored, edited, and published
- newspapers and magazines
- peer-reviewed journals
- peer-reviewed articles
- PhD or MBA dissertations and research
- public library including *Questia*
- scholarly articles
- isolated studies or academic research
- educational institutions and their websites

To determine reliability of **online sites and their organizations**, determine the URL’s (Uniform Resources Locator) ending:

- If the site ends in **.edu**, it is most likely an educational institution. Be aware, however, of political bias.
- If the site ends in **.gov**, it is most likely a reliable government website. These sites usually provide good sources for statistics and objective reports.
- If the site ends in **.org**, it is usually a non-profit organization. These sources vary in being good or poor sources of information. You need to research their possible agendas or political biases, if they exist.

Reputable online journals and magazines:

- Contain a bibliography for every article
- List sources within that bibliography that are sometimes extensive and always include scholarly, non-Internet sources
- Have statistics and data within the article that validate the claims made by the author

News sources:

- Every television and print news source has a website.
- They are reliable, but sometimes the focus is to entertain rather than inform.
- Think of these sources as a steppingstone to more reliable sources.

List of unreliable sources – print and online:

The following are unreliable sources because they require confirmation with a reliable source:

- Wikipedia. Although this site is a good starting point for finding initial ideas about a topic, some of their information and attached resources may not be reliable.
- Blogs, tweets
- Personal websites
- Forums
- Questionable sites created by organizations that may have political or biased agendas
- Sites that provide biased information
- Self-published sources
- Opinionated articles such as editorials
- Online sources with an URL (Uniform Resources Locator) that ends in **html** (HyperText Markup Language), which is the basic building block of webpages
- Some online sources with an URL (Uniform Resources Locator) that ends in **.com**
- Sites of companies that conduct their business over the internet. Some of these sites are unreliable because they have hidden agendas.

