

12

EVALUATING & CHOOSING SOURCES

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In Chapter 11, we discussed how to begin your research to explore topics—and ultimately to come up with a research question and proposal. We assume in this chapter that you've done your preliminary research, you have a topic, and you are ready to focus in on an important aspect of that topic. In the following pages, we will discuss research in greater depth, covering how to identify a source that is appropriate, reliable, and useful to you.

Getting Started with Sources

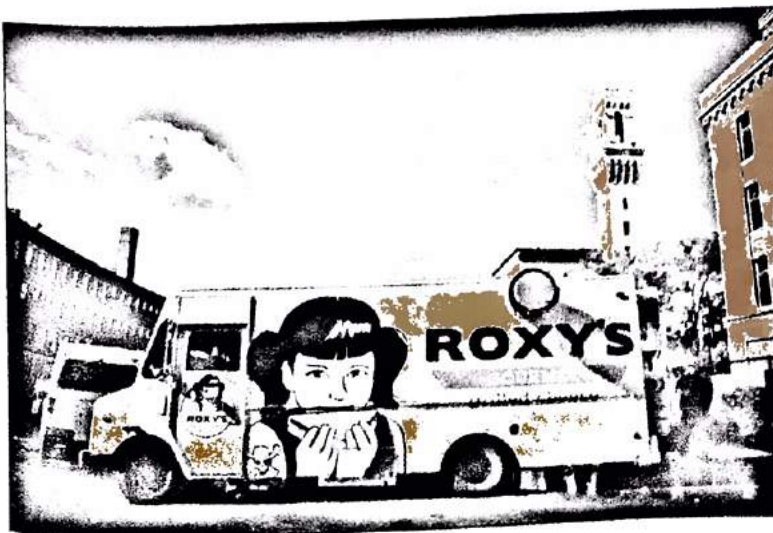
What Are Sources?

The word *source* comes from the Anglo-French word *surse*, which means “to rise or to begin.” Think of a source as a starting point. To cook something you've never made before, you might first refer to a cookbook, an online recipe database, or the Food Network for inspiration. To plan a trip, you might begin with sources including maps, photos, and brochures. To begin a research paper, you might refer to Google and online databases such as EBSCOhost and ProQuest, and consult research librarians and professors to shape and define your ideas and narrow your topic.

In the context of this book, we see everything you read (or view, or listen to, or experience in any way), every text you encounter, every conversation you have, as a potential source for your writing. When you compose—whether in college or on the job—you draw on sources for information and opinions. These sources do more than get you started; they are also the texts that you'll converse with throughout your composing process, from your earliest topic ideas to your final project. (For more on early topic ideas, see Chapter 11. For information on later stages of research and writing, see Chapter 13.)

ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

What research have you done for other courses? Where did you seek advice? What sources worked especially well? What do you wish you'd done differently or better?



◀ ARTIFACT

Roxy's Gourmet Grilled Cheese is based in Boston. Researching food? A food truck or other eatery can be a valuable source of firsthand information.

Credit: f1.2/Alamy Stock Photo.

Can a food truck be a source? Sure. Especially if you're researching the trend of food trucks, or the growing number of people who identify themselves as "foodies." Maybe you're interested in comparing the old-time ice-cream truck to the phenomenon of the food truck. Depending on your argument, you might use the truck as a starting point for your research, talking with its chef or operator to learn more about the business: its operation, clientele, and profitability. Or maybe about the food itself: the source of its ingredients and its nutritional value. (See roxysgrilledcheese.com.)

Where Do I Find Sources?

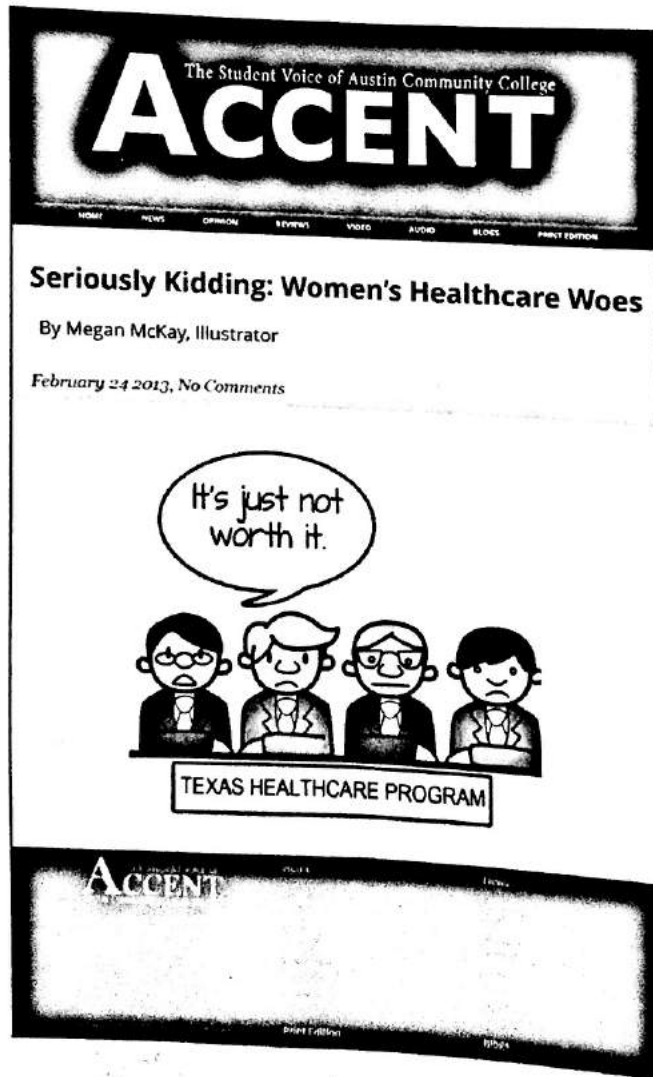
Sources are everywhere. Imagine that a friend tells you about an upcoming debate about women's healthcare on campus; because she has provided you with information, your friend is a source. Let's say you become interested in the debate and decide to search your online campus newspaper for articles and editorials on the topic. Your campus paper and the materials it contains are sources. From there, you could learn

► STUDENT NEWSPAPER: EDITORIAL PAGE

Accent: The Student Voice of Austin Community College.

Here a student offers a commentary on women's healthcare in the state of Texas, which has some of the most restrictive reproductive health policies in the country. Your own campus publication may provide an excellent source for ideas, facts, and opinions on your topic.

Credit: The Accent



more by talking to a member of the campus health center staff, or a local activist organization supporting women's healthcare. The people you talk with and the discussions you have with them are sources.

What Can Sources Do for Me?

For one thing, they help you make decisions. You use sources all the time—not only to inform your school and work projects, but to aid you in making informed choices. For example, you want to choose a movie to see this weekend. You'd probably consult a variety of sources: Maybe you'd read film reviews, watch current movie trailers, or talk with a film-buff friend. Or imagine you're shopping for a car. You would probably do some research; you would probably visit some manufacturers' sites, talk to your mechanic and other car owners, or visit dealerships for test drives. You might check out the advice at Cars.com.

Now that you have a sense of what sources are, the rest of this chapter will show you how to:

- Locate and preview sources
- Identify sources in terms of general versus specialized academic
- Read sources critically, with attention to author, purpose, audience, and other rhetorical concerns
- Evaluate what sources will be best for your own research and writing

What's a General Source? What's a Specialized Academic Source?

When you look at a source, think about who created that text, and for what purpose and for what audience. That will guide you as to when and how to use that source.

General Sources General sources are aimed at a general audience; that is, they're written by knowledgeable authors and are meant to be understood by nonexperts. For example, a journalist who regularly covers local politics for your newspaper might write a piece to inform readers about a scandal at city hall. To get the gist of the story, you don't have to know anything about local politics or politicians. General sources help you:

- Begin to understand the overall topic
- Begin to see what the subtopics are
- Discover keywords
- Find the different conversations that are related to the topic
- Begin to explore your research questions

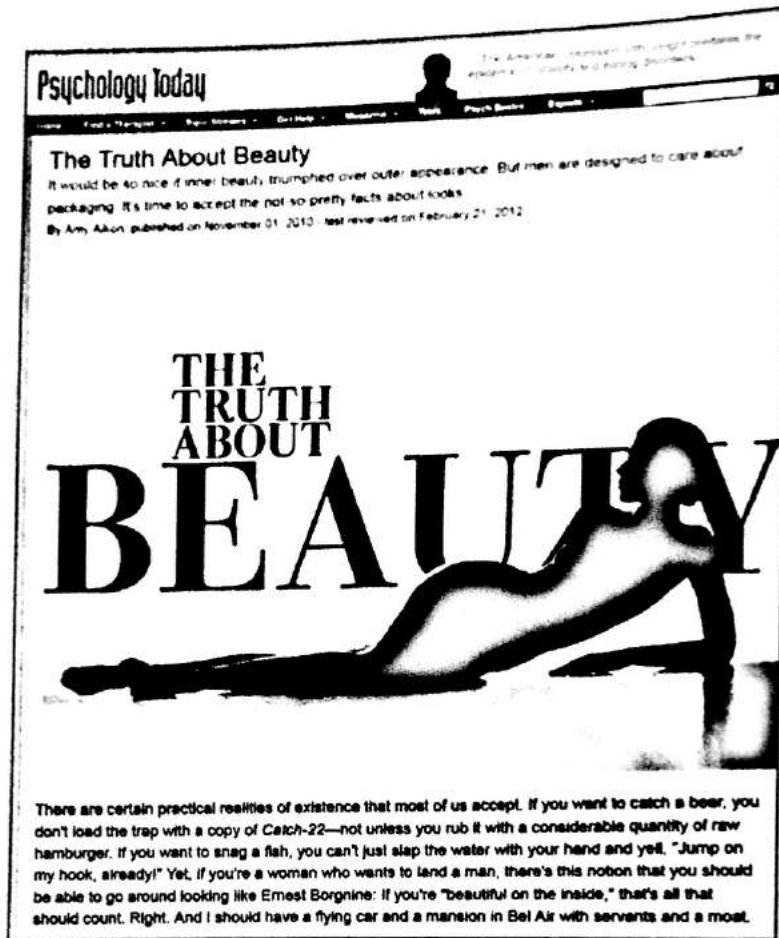
ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

Did you ever start reading a source and realize that you were in over your head? What were the indicators? Have you ever had the opposite experience—you started reading a source and realized it was much too simple? What were the indicators?

► ARTICLE:
GENERAL SOURCE

Psychology Today.
Amy Alkon's article,
"The Truth about
Beauty," is aimed at a
general audience.

Credit: Copyright © 2010
Sussex Publishers, LLC



An example of a general source is "The Truth about Beauty," an article written by Amy Alkon, a journalist and writer for the magazine *Psychology Today*. Alkon's purpose is to persuade her audience, primarily middle-aged women, about how men define beauty. Her ultimate goal in the article is to empower women so that they can understand their choices and the effects of their choices when it comes to beauty and landing a man.

Specialized Academic Sources These sources are aimed at (you guessed it!) specialized academic readers. They are usually written by scholars and other experts—professors, scientists, doctors, and researchers—who have studied the subject extensively. An example of a specialized academic source is an article from *JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association)* on a new clinical trial and its success. Readers of such an article would include doctors interested in new treatments that they can incorporate in their own practice. Although academic articles are aimed at people with expertise on a given subject, that doesn't mean you should avoid these sources. They may include information that you can use—and may become easier to understand as you deepen your research and gain an understanding of your topic (and associated

terms and vocabulary). You might turn to these sources once you've built a foundation of understanding with your general sources. Specialized academic sources help you:

- Delve into a topic in depth
- See how experts view the subject
- Access the latest research in the field
- Access critiques of research in the field
- Find other academic sources through Works Cited lists and bibliographies

An example of a specialized academic article is a piece on self-esteem development by Ruth Yasemin Erol and Ulrich Orth (see below), which appeared in the American Psychological Association's publication, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. In the article, the authors examine the ways that early self-esteem affects health and happiness in later life. The primary audience for this piece consists of psychology and sociology scholars interested in social behavior.

How Do I Preview a Source Critically?

Previewing your sources before committing to them is worth the effort. Ask yourself the following questions to identify what you might expect from a particular source, and whether you will want to use it in your research.

ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

A word about specialized sources. In addition to specialized academic sources, depending on your topic, you might also deal with specialized technical sources, such as technical manuals or drawings. For example, if you are researching ecotourism, you might use as a source a schematic drawing of a water treatment plant, one that an engineer might refer to on the job.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

SEARCH IN Publications

Home » Publications » APA and Affiliated Journals » Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology®

Editors: Elliot R. Smith, Jeffrey A. Simpson, and Laura A. King

ISSN: 0022-3614
eISSN: 1938-1293
Published: monthly
ISI Impact Factor: 5.076
Psychology - Social, 2 of 80
Read Sample Articles
Advertising Information

Table of Contents and Online First Publication

Editorial Board

- Jeffrey A. Simpson, Editor, JPSP: IJOP section, January 2009 (PDF 11KB)
- Laura A. King, Editor, JPSP: PMS section, January 2010 (PDF 13KB)
- Elliot R. Smith, Editor, JPSP: ABC section, January 2012 (PDF 16KB)

A WEB SITE & ARTICLE: SPECIALIZED ACADEMIC SOURCE American Psychological Association. This article from the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* is aimed at an audience of experts.

Self-Esteem Development From Age 14 to 30 Years: A Longitudinal Study

Ruth Yasemin Erol and Ulrich Orth
University of Basel

We examined the development of self-esteem in adolescence and young adulthood. Data come from the Young Adults section of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which includes 8 waves over a 15-year period of a national probability sample of 7,000 individuals age 17 to 24 years. Linear growth curve models indicated that self-esteem increases during adolescence and continues to increase more slowly in young adulthood. It seems that some fall out of line at these developmental junctures. In adolescence, they may feel more self-esteem than Blacks and Whites, but the self-esteem of Hispanics subsequently increased more strongly so that at age 30 Blacks and Hispanics had the self-esteem that Whites at each age. Moreover, health, unemployment, and crime rates in adulthood, indicators of higher self-esteem that consistently indicate successful and less problematic midlife outcomes at each age, high rates of anxiety, low self-esteem, and lower health predicted higher self-esteem. Finally, the results suggest that increasing income in later adulthood is associated with a large proportion of the increase in self-esteem.

Keywords: self-esteem, adolescence, young adulthood, development, life, personality traits

Low self-esteem in adolescence and young adulthood is a risk factor for negative outcomes in important life domains. For example, Eisenhardt et al. (2006) found that low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poorer mental and physical health, lower academic, self-efficacy, and higher levels of internalized stress in young adulthood. Similarly, other studies found that low self-esteem prospectively predicts emotional behavior, eating disorder, future depression, and suicidal ideation (Eisenhardt, Roberts, & Miller, 2011; Miller & Williams, 2000; Orth, Robles, & Roberts, 2010). Research findings also suggest that the development of self-esteem, which is defined as "a person's appraisal of his or her value" (Jost & Hunnicutt, 2002, p. 7), may have significant consequences for life outcomes. However, the majority of studies of self-esteem development and the ways that affect it are still limited to the present study, and therefore cannot clearly the trajectory of self-esteem during adolescence and young adulthood and to which underlying factors at the level and stage of the trajectory.

Self-Esteem Development in Adolescence and Young Adulthood

With regard to adolescence, previous research on self-esteem development has yielded inconsistent results. Several studies reported an increase in self-esteem from the Midlife Study (Holt & Hill, 1998; Huang, 2001; Johnson, Pincus, & Wines, 2001).

1999; McCreedy & Hogg, 1987; Miller, Miller, & Nussbaum, 1997; O'Malley & Redman, 1983; Pincus, Ansel, & Huppel, 1979; Pincus, Allen, & Finkel, 2009; Roberts & Eccles, 1999; Toppas & Campbell, 2001), whereas other studies reported the self-esteem does not change at this time (Eisenhardt et al., 2006; Orth & Roberts, 2009). In cross-sectional studies, Orth, Robles, & Roberts (2010) and Miller & Williams (2000) found that self-esteem increases during young adulthood, but Orth, Robles, & Roberts (2010) found no increase in self-esteem during young adulthood. In contrast, Orth, Robles, & Roberts (2010) found no increase in self-esteem during young adulthood. In contrast, Orth, Robles, & Roberts (2010) found no increase in self-esteem during young adulthood. In contrast, Orth, Robles, & Roberts (2010) found no increase in self-esteem during young adulthood.

Advocates of Self-Esteem Development

In addition to tracking the change of self-esteem over time, the research community has also been exploring individual differences in self-esteem development in adolescence and young adulthood (Orth, Robles, & Roberts, 2010). We wanted to test the effects of demographic variables (gender and ethnic) on the five parameters (rate, time of increase, and ending health, etc.)

Gender

Previous research on gender differences in self-esteem suggests that male adolescents have higher self-esteem than female adolescents do at both in 1997 (Furley et al., 1997) Johnson et al.

1. What is the overall rhetorical situation?

That is, what is the context of the source? Who wrote this piece, why, for whom, and how? And how does this impact the value of this text as a potential source?

Following is an example that we'll refer to throughout this section. It's an editorial published at Bloomberg.com.

► EDITORIAL, EXCERPTED

Bloomberg.com.

An opinion piece by the editorial board of Bloomberg has a specific purpose and is written for a specific audience. These factors are important to consider when you are choosing sources.

Bloomberg VIEW Our Company Professional Anywhere

HOME QUICK NEWS **OPINION** MARKET DATA PERSONAL FINANCE TECH POLITICS

Illustration by Bloomberg View

Western U.S. Will Keep Burning Unless Fire Policy Changes

By the Editors Jul 16, 2012 6:30 PM ET

f t in 22 COMMENTS

QUEUE

It is only mid-July, and Colorado has already had its most destructive wildfire in history — some 350 houses in and near Colorado Springs burned, causing more than \$110 million in damage.

This broke the previous state record, which was set earlier this summer in a fire farther up the Front Range of the Rockies. In May and June, New Mexico suffered its most devastating blaze ever -- worse than the one last year that threatened Los Alamos.

This is a scary trend.

In the 1960s, Colorado had about 460 fires a year that burned an average of 8,000 acres, according to a report compiled from state forest service records. In the past 10 years, the state averaged about 2,500 fires a year that consumed about 100,000 acres.

Climate change plays a role. Higher average temperatures mean the snowpack recedes earlier, and the fire season is extended in some places by almost two months. A study in Montana found that a rise of one degree in summer temperatures doubles costs of protecting a home against fire.

Yet hand-wringing about global climate patterns shouldn't distract us from dealing with the primary causes of the danger: human development and forest policy.

As more people moved to the so-called Wildland Urban Interface, where houses and forests intersect, the national policy of suppressing fires rather than letting them burn became more entrenched. That has meant fewer natural fires, which burn the underbrush but allow the mature trees to survive and propagate. In recent decades, fuel on the ground has built up, causing today's fires to burn more intensely, leaving a moonscape of ash.

Life and property have been lost in the fires, at unfathomable cost. But this can't be allowed to obscure the burden borne by U.S. taxpayers -- more than \$3 billion annually. About half of the Forest Service's entire budget goes into fighting wildfires, up from 13 percent in 1995.

What's the Rhetorical Situation?

Bloomberg Editors, "Western U.S. Will Keep Burning Unless Fire Policy Changes"

To get a sense of the rhetorical situation of this Bloomberg editorial—or any potential source—ask and answer some basic questions:

- **Who wrote this piece?** The editorial board at Bloomberg, an influential news organization focused on business and finance and with clout in both of these areas.
- **Why?** The Bloomberg editors wanted to address the disastrous Colorado fires of the summer of 2012. Their purpose was to persuade readers that the government could adopt a course of action that could prevent future fires—and also save taxpayers money.
- **For whom?** Bloomberg's audience includes general readers with Internet access interested in business news and a "business take" on issues—both in Colorado and across the country—as well as business and government leaders who could do something about the problem.
- **How?** The editors collaborated to come up with their collective view on government policies regarding fires in the Rockies. They published their editorial in the opinion section of their Web site. The editorial includes hyperlinks to related materials, and there are options for commenting and linking to social networking.

As you look at sources, think about the rhetorical context of each by paying attention to the authors and their purposes, their target audiences and how they appeal to them, and the modes and media that they use for delivering their messages.

Purpose First, ask yourself: Who is the author of this piece? What are his or her reasons for writing? What assumptions does the author make? How does all of this fit in with what I'm looking for? Keep in mind:

- *What is the author's background?* This information will give you a sense of the author's credibility (ethos) and his or her perspective on the topic at hand. Begin by reading any biographical information provided and see if there are links to any other writing the author has done on this topic. The authors of the editorial about fire policy (p. 321) are the members of Bloomberg's editorial board. Bloomberg is a well-respected news group focused on money and the marketplace, part of what makes this source a trustworthy one.
- *Is the author seeking to persuade?* Report information? Tell a story? All of the above? How does this fit with the type of information you're looking for? Begin by examining the title and then skim the piece with a critical eye.
- *What are the author's biases?* While you're skimming, keep an eye out for assumptions built into the text. The Bloomberg editorial represents the viewpoints of editors whose priorities are business growth and other financial concerns rather than the environment and other aspects of fire policy.

Audience Ask yourself: Where did I find this text? Was it published in a popular magazine? A specialized academic journal? At a particular Web site? If so, who is the main audience for that magazine, journal, or Web site?

- *Am I part of the author's primary audience?* Based on the text's origin and a quick read of its contents, is the author aiming at a general readership or a narrower, more specialized audience? Evaluate the piece in terms of whether you find it readable, challenging, or perhaps oversimplified or condescending. Ask yourself: How much subject knowledge does the author assume readers have? As for the editors at Bloomberg (p. 321), they write for businesspeople, not environmentalists, so their take on fire policy is likely going to mesh better with the concerns of the business community than those of tree huggers.

Rhetorical appeals In general, what strategies does the author use to build his or her case and connect with readers?

- *Does the author use ethos, logos, and pathos to connect with readers?* How much authority does the author convey in the writing? Is the writing logical? To what extent does it appeal to your emotions? For example, you might realize as you analyze an author's appeal to pathos that his or her argument is not logical. At that point (unless you want a piece that is not logical, perhaps so you can critique it), you

ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

Have you ever discovered something about a writer that made you question his or her reliability? Have you ever been unsure about a writer's trustworthiness and then made a discovery that changed your mind?

might decide not to use the source. In the case of the Bloomberg editorial, the numerical data particularly appeals to their business and government audience.

- Does the author use humor? Again, examine the title and skim the composition. If the author uses humor, does it work to strengthen the piece? How well does a humorous piece fit in with your topic and research?

Modes & media

- **Modes** In what mode was the source produced—written, audio, video, or something else? How does the composer's choice of mode contribute to the composition? What assumptions do you have about the mode? For example, it's fair to assume that hearing an audio essay, which features the composer's voice, is a more intimate experience than reading an article online. By considering mode you're more aware of how the author appeals to his or her audience.
- **Media** In what medium is the source delivered—print, digital, or something else? What does the composer's choice of medium tell you about his or her assumptions about the audience? For example, digital sources are used primarily by audiences with access to computers or smartphones. Think, too, about the relationship between medium and the currency of information. A composer who publishes online can make revisions to the piece, adding links to newer articles on the topic at hand.

ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

Do you think that some modes are more reliable than others? For example, do you assume that printed sources are more authoritative than stories you hear on the radio? Why or why not?

TIME Photos

In Boise, Housing Struggles to Emerge From Its Malaise

LightBox LIFE Pictures of the Week TIME Covers

NICE HOUSE, BUT...
 Vinny and Karla Trovato, along with their kids, Steven and Ashley enjoy their new home, in a subdivision north of Boise, but they are surrounded by empty lots and unsold homes.

• Why There's Hope About Housing

► PHOTO ESSAY

Time. This photo essay, "In Boise, Housing Struggles to Emerge from Its Malaise," includes photos by Danny Wilcox Frazier of Redux, and captions by *Time* editors. As you consider sources, think about the genre of those sources (see the box on page 321).

Credit: Danny Wilcox Frazier/Redux

2. What is the genre of the piece?

What are you looking at? What kind of composition is it? What qualities is this genre known for? What makes this text a potentially workable source, or not?

Following is an example that we'll refer to throughout this section. It's a photo essay published at *Time* magazine's Web site. The photos are by Danny Wilcox Frazier of Redux photography, and the text was written by editors at *Time*.

What's the Genre?

Time and Danny Wilcox Frazier/Redux, "In Boise, Housing Struggles to Emerge from Its Malaise"

When you look at a potential source, you want to understand its rhetorical situation (see the Bloomberg editorial on p. 320)—its authorship, purpose, audience, etc.

You also want a sense of the genre that the composer chose—will it work for you?—as well as the style, design, and other sources drawn on. Ask and answer the following questions:

- **What am I looking at?** The image on the facing page is from a photo essay published online, created by *Time* editors and a photographer.
- **What qualities is this genre known for?** Photo essayists combine images and words to tell a story and/or to make an argument. Here, the editors at *Time* show the impact of an economic crisis—and hoped-for recovery—on a community. The title, "In Boise, Housing Struggles to Emerge from Its Malaise," suggests the argument being made.
- **What makes this text a potentially workable source, or not?** The authorship of this photo essay and its publication in a respected magazine make it a promising source. Also promising is that the journalists who composed the piece conducted interviews with residents. The genre makes it useful to a researcher looking for a persuasive visual/textual argument-based on experience.

Elements of the genre Ask yourself: What do I know about the genre? What can I expect or assume about it? Keep in mind:

- **What is the scope of the information?** Different genres present different amounts and degrees of information: An encyclopedia entry provides an overview of information, while a peer-reviewed journal article provides in-depth treatment.
- **How reliable is the information?** Some genres are known for their reliability and objectivity, others less so. For example, in terms of factual accuracy, a peer-reviewed journal article is probably more reliable than a political ad. (See also Chapter 1, "Rhetorical Situations and Choices.")
- **What is the connection between genre and purpose?** Remember we talked in Chapter 2 about how genre is a social response to a rhetorical situation? For example,

the authors of the photo essay (see p. 323) chose that genre for a reason. The *Time* editors and photographer Danny Wilcox Frazier, who collaborated on the photo essay, chose to focus on the human side of the housing crisis in Boise. Consider how differently the business-oriented Bloomberg editorial board might have dealt with the same issue, perhaps writing an opinion piece on the financial aspects of the crisis rather than on how people deal with losing their homes.

style When evaluating a source, pay attention to the style of the author. Ask yourself:

- *How does the author use language?* As you skim, pay attention to the writer's word choice and vocabulary level. To what extent do they contribute to (or undermine) the author's ethos? How formal or informal is the language? Does the writer use slang? If so, keep in mind that slang is not an indicator of unreliability, just as formal language is not an indicator of reliability.
- *What is the author's tone? How does he or she use voice?* Describe the author's presence in the text. How does he or she use stylistic techniques to create a memorable voice and tone? For any source, pay attention to tone—some authors may be off-putting, while an author with an engaging voice and tone might get you to read a piece that you weren't initially sure about.
- *How well does the author's style work with the chosen genre?* Think of the author's style in the context of the genre the author composed in. For example, if the author has written an editorial, ask yourself: Is the style generally in keeping with other editorials? For example, is it direct and persuasive?
- *What special techniques does the author use? How much detail does he or she provide?* Does the author use literary techniques, such as dialogue, setting, and metaphor? How do these techniques get and keep your attention? And how detailed does the author get? Paying attention to these factors will assist you in deciding whether to commit to the source; in the best cases, other authors provide examples of techniques that you can adapt in your own writing. Consider the *Time*/Frazier photo essay as a source (p. 323). The editors don't go into much detail in the textual part of the essay, but the photos they chose highlight the personal connections people have with their homes.

Design All compositions—from the lowliest e-mail to the biggest-budget film—are designed. Ask yourself: Is the source I'm looking at presented in a way that draws me in?

- *How are text and images laid out? How does the author use spatial arrangement to guide your reading?* How does formatting, such as use of capital letters, bold, or special fonts, direct your attention or shape your understanding of the source's organization? Is color used to highlight information? As with style, you might notice how an author uses design elements to communicate with a reader and decide to try some of the same techniques yourself. Designs that you find

annoying or gimmicky may turn you off to a source, and the opposite may happen too: Clever design that resonates with you can draw you in.

- How are sound and other nontext/nonimage elements arranged? How does the composer use sound to guide your listening? How does the composer use sound to evoke emotion? How do these elements direct your attention toward or away from aspects of the piece? Note, for example, how in the *Time*/Frazier photo essay (p. 323), the photos stand out against the black background.

ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

What is the price of drawing on unreliable sources? Have you ever lost faith in an author because of the sources he or she used? What were the sources? What made them seem unreliable?

Sources When you preview a text, learn what you can about its author's research methods, and therefore the text's validity. Ask yourself:

- How did the author gather and analyze data? For example, if you're looking at an article that draws its data from surveys of large groups, you expect to encounter a lot of statistics and charts that compile the data. You'd also hope that the data is dependable. For example, the *Time* editors who created the photo essay on the housing situation in Idaho visited the location and conducted interviews, gathering information firsthand.
- What types of sources did the author draw on? Pay attention to where the author obtained the information on which the piece is based. Also, keep in mind the type of information you're looking for. For example, if you want facts on a specific topic and the source you're looking at is anecdotal or only relies on the author's experiences rather than on scientific research, you might decide the source won't be of use to you after all.
- Did the author document sources? Are sources listed in a bibliography or Works Cited list? Within the text, are specific details about sources given, such as page numbers and dates of publication for written sources? For example, in the *Time*/Frazier photo essay (p. 323), the writers refer to the names of the homeowners in the text of the piece.
- Did the author not conduct research? Not all authors conduct outside research, especially when they compose in particular genres such as the memoir. In the case of the memoir, the source that informs the piece is the author himself or herself—it's based on his or her own experiences.

Previewing a Source

Emily Kahn | Women in Comic Books Project

Let's follow a student, Emily Kahn, as she previews a possible source. Emily is interested in comics and graphic novels, and she plans to write an academic argument about the portrayal of women in these works. She locates a promising-looking article on the topic of women in graphic works in *Lightspeed: Science Fiction & Fantasy*, a weekly online magazine for fans of sci-fi and fantasy literature. The article, "The Objectification of Women in Comic Books," is by a writer named Jehanzeb.

Before Emily reads the article in depth or adds it to her working bibliography, she will preview it. This means she'll dig around to better understand the context of the article.



▲ STUDENT AUTHOR

Emily Kahn.

Credit: megamix/Getty Images

Keeping in mind the factors outlined above, Emily will set out to learn basic information about the publisher and author of the article—in addition to the author's purpose, audience, choice of genre, and more.

1. What Is *Lightspeed* Magazine?

Emily first considers who publishes the magazine in which the article appears. She asks herself:

- What type of magazine is this?
- Who publishes it?
- What is the quality of the work presented there?
- Who is the main audience?
- Are the articles in the magazine peer-reviewed? Scholarly?

On the "About" page, she reads a note from the publisher (see below).

For Emily, the facts that *Lightspeed* has been nominated for a number of awards and that the editor seems to be knowledgeable are important selling points. While at first glance *Lightspeed* might look like a fanzine, she sees when she browses the contents that the nonfiction pieces published there seem sophisticated in terms of subject matter, cultural analysis, and the use of sources and Works Cited lists. *Lightspeed* may be more scholarly than she'd originally thought, though it's very readable for a general audience. She's not sure what to assume about it, so she reads on.

ABOUT

Lightspeed is an online science fiction and fantasy magazine. In its pages, you will find science fiction: from near-future, sociological soft SF, to far-future, star-spanning hard SF—and fantasy: from epic fantasy, sword-and-sorcery, and contemporary urban tales, to magical realism, science-fantasy, and folktales. No subject is off-limits, and we encourage our writers to take chances with their fiction and push the envelope.

Lightspeed was a finalist for the 2011 & 2012 Hugo Awards, and stories from *Lightspeed* have been nominated for the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, and the Theodore Sturgeon Award.

Edited by bestselling anthologist John Joseph Adams, every month *Lightspeed* brings you a mix of originals and reprints, and featuring a variety of authors—from the bestsellers and award-winners you already know to the best new voices you haven't heard of yet. When you read *Lightspeed*, it is our hope that you'll see where science fiction and fantasy comes from, where it is now, and where it's going.

▲ MAGAZINE

Lightspeed.

"About" page. Emily begins her initial research, locating an article, "The Objectification of Women in Comic Books," in an online magazine for sci-fi fans, titled *Lightspeed*. She goes to the "About" page to learn more about the publication and the people behind it.

ATTENTION, RESEARCHERS

A word about previewing. When you find a source, do basic detective work before you commit to it. Start by getting to know its publisher and author. Ask yourself:

1. Where did the piece appear? Was it published by a scholarly journal? A well-known news outlet? An obscure but solid-looking blog? To what extent does the publisher have a specific point of view or agenda (e.g., *The Weekly Standard* states that it is a conservative publication)? How will this perspective fit in (or compare/contrast) with my project?
 2. Who is the author? Someone I've heard of? Someone I don't know, but who seems to be a good writer?
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2. Who Are the Editors & Staff Members at *Lightspeed* Magazine?

Emily scrolls down to the masthead to find out more about the magazine's editorial staff.

She asks herself:

- What can I learn about who runs the magazine?
- Who is the publisher or main editor? What are his or her credentials? Is this an independent company, or is a parent company in charge?
- Who are the other editors and regular contributors to the magazine? What else have they written, and for what publications?
- Are the editors and contributors scholars? Critics? Fans of the genres of science and fantasy fiction? Authors themselves?

Emily is curious about the publisher and editor-in-chief, John Joseph Adams, and sees that he has won several awards as an anthologist and also is affiliated with *Wired.com*. She notices that *Lightspeed's* monthly sponsor is Orbit Books, an imprint of Hachette, which publishes books by authors she has read, so that adds to the magazine's credibility. Reading down the masthead, she sees that many editors are published authors themselves who also write critical articles for other magazines devoted to fantasy, science fiction, horror, culture, and comics. Emily is pleasantly surprised that the editors of *Lightspeed* are more than enthusiastic consumers of science fiction and fantasy: They are experts as well. From the information Emily reads on the "About," "Our Staff," and "Our Sponsor" pages, she finds that *Lightspeed* magazine may be an appropriate source for her paper.

3. Who Is Jehanzeb, the Author of the Article?

Emily sees that *Lightspeed* attributes the article to a writer named Jehanzeb, for whom no last name is given. She asks herself:

- How can I discover the last name of the author, so that I can learn more about this writer?
- Is there a biography somewhere? Maybe a link to a blog or personal Web site?
- What else has this author written—whether on this topic or others? And where has his or her work been published?
- How much credibility does the author convey?

Emily first needs to discover Jehanzeb's full name. She notices a brief biography at the end of the article, which links to Jehanzeb's blog, where the article was first published. She also sees that *Lightspeed* has published three other articles by Jehanzeb on the topic of women in comics. To learn more, Emily follows the link to Jehanzeb's *Broken Mystic* blog, where he posts poems, personal writing, and articles. There she links to a second blog, called *Muslim Reverie*, where Jehanzeb posts about "politics, current events, feminism, and media literacy." Here Emily discovers that his last name is Dar. She notices e-mail links at both blogs, so she can contact him directly. She thinks she might do that if she decides to use his article as a source in her research.



Jehanzeb is a film student who writes about Islam, Feminism, Politics, and Media. This piece was originally published on his blog.

Tagged as comics

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◀ AUTHOR PHOTO & BIO

Jehanzeb Dar.
A photo from Jehanzeb's blog and a brief biographical note that appears with his article in *Lightspeed*. Emily begins to find out more about Dar, the author of the article she's interested in.

Credit: Jehanzeb Dar

Now that Emily knows Jehanzeb's full name, she does a quick Google search to learn more about him. She wonders: Has Jehanzeb Dar published elsewhere—besides *Lightspeed* magazine and his blog? To what extent is he considered an expert on comics? A critic? She's interested to discover that Dar was interviewed by the Associated Press about the film *Prince of Persia*.

By tracking down information through the bio that appeared with the article, through Dar's blogs, and through a Google search, Emily has turned up some rich information. As her mental picture of Dar gets clearer—as a writer, and as a thinker and critic who takes part in larger, public conversations about the presentation of race in popular culture—she becomes more interested in his article on women in comics as a source for her paper.

4. What Type of Article Is This? Will It Work for My Topic?

Now that Emily has a better sense of *Lightspeed* magazine and the writer Jehanzeb Dar, she's ready to do a closer reading of the article itself. Below is Dar's article, along with Emily's notes in the margins—you can see how she identifies her assumptions and also begins to read the piece closely and critically. At this point, she is still deciding on whether to use this source. Once she's done some annotating, she's ready to make her final call.

Guided Process | How to Preview a Source

Emily Kahn (STUDENT), *Women in Comic Books Project: Previewing Jehanzeb Dar*

As she reads, Emily asks herself the following questions:

- What is Dar's main purpose? And how does this fit in with my research questions?
- Who is his primary audience? Am I part of it? How does he connect with readers through rhetorical appeals?
- What genre is this piece? Based on what I know about the genre, what assumptions can I make?