

Assessing Sources

Once you have found sources that appear to be useful for your paper, how will you decide which ones to use? A good search will still yield more results than you can reasonably read, so you need ways to decide which sources are worth your time, and which ones you can skip.

First, read the *abstract* for the source. In the previously mentioned databases, every source has an *abstract*, or summary of its content that is only a paragraph. This is an easy way to determine if the source is actually focusing on your research paper topic.

After reading the abstract, there are four basic principles to use when assessing a source.

1. *Current*: Is the source offering current information?
Has it been published recently? Or if not recently, was it published at a time that makes sense for your topic? Old sources can contain information that is no longer correct, so think about **WHEN** the source was published.
2. *Reliable*: Is the source offering reliable information?
Is the information given in the source cited? Is it information that can be confirmed from a second source? Is there obvious bias in the way the information is being presented? Unreliable sources can cause a lot of problems, so think about **WHERE** the information is coming from.
3. *Authority*: Does the source come from an authority on the topic?
Is the author(s) an expert on the topic? Do they have the expertise to write knowledgeably about the topic? Is the source published by a reputable company or institution? Anyone can write anything on the internet, so think about **WHO** is providing the information you use.
4. *Purpose*: What was the intended purpose of this source?
Is this source intended to inform or to persuade? Is the source trying to sell a product or prove a particular political point? Is the source a result of scholarly research and/or interest? There are lots of different reasons that people write things, so think about **WHY** this information was provided.