

Finding Reliable Sources

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A reliable source is one that provides a thorough, well-reasoned theory, argument, discussion, etc. based on strong evidence.



Scholarly, peer-reviewed articles or books -written by researchers for students and researchers. Original research, extensive bibliography. Found in [WSA academic databases](#) and Google Scholar. [Anatomy of a Scholarly Article](#).



Trade or professional articles or books - written by practitioners in a field to impart practice-oriented information. Found in WSA databases. Some may also be found through Google or other search engines, but may require payment to see the full text. Beware of sources on the internet that *look* like trade/professional articles, but don't have reliable content.



Magazine articles, books and newspaper articles from well-established newspapers - written for a general audience by authors or journalists who have consulted reliable sources and vetted through an editor. These sources may provide some of their articles online for free. Newspapers and magazines often contain both researched news stories and editorial/opinion pieces that express the view of the writer. It is important to be able to distinguish between them! Beware of sources on the internet that *look* like reputable magazines, and newspapers, but don't have reliable content.



Websites and blogs - can be reliable or unreliable, hoaxes or sincere misinformation. Researchers and other experts often use blogs as a way to share their knowledge with the general public, but anyone with computer access can do so too, to further any agenda they want. It's up to you to evaluate the quality of what you find online. Online news sources are particularly notorious for false information. Professor Melissa Zimdars of Merrimack College put together a document called "[False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical 'News' Sources](#)" to help you read news sources with a critical eye .



Wikipedia - is not an allowed source in IB Theatre at West Sound Academy. Why? Because some entries are reliable, some are not - it's up to you to evaluate. The authors are anonymous, so there's no way to determine their expertise, or the expertise of the Wikipedia editor who oversees the entry. Wikipedia editors will post warnings if they think the entry has weaknesses. Wikipedia entries tend to be conservative, reflecting traditional views over newer research.

HOWEVER, if you look at the end of a Wikipedia entry, you may find listed the titles of the sources for the entry and they may be worthwhile sources. There is no guarantee but it doesn't hurt to follow them up.

WHO decides a source is reliable?

Peer Review - Scholarly Books & Journal Articles

A scholar/researcher/professor writes an article (aka 'manuscript') or book proposal. then they.....

1.submit the manuscript or proposal to an academic journal or book publisher in their field of study
2. The book or journal editor decides whether the topic and overall quality of the manuscript or proposal is appropriate for their journal or publication catalog.
3. If it is acceptable, the editor emails the manuscript or proposal to 2 or 3 scholarly experts in the subject
4. The experts read, critique, recommend:
 - 1) publish as is (rare)
 - 2) publish with revisions (major or minor)
 - 3) Do not publish.

Editorial Review

The editor(s) are experienced practitioners or journalists

Used by:

- Magazines for a general audience
- professional or trade magazines for practitioners in a field
- professional newspapers (print or online)

You Review

Everything you find online through Google or other search engines, Facebook, etc.

It could be anything, from a scholarly, peer-reviewed article to a well-meaning but misinformed article, to a hoax.

Criteria for Evaluating Reliability

The books and articles you find in the library catalog, or in a West Sound Academy Library database have been through a review process by scholarly or professional peers/editors. This process makes them much more likely to be reliable, fact-checked sources. Sources on the internet may or may not go through any fact-checking or editorial process. You must determine reliability yourself.

So ask yourself these questions. . .



Who is the author and are they credible?

- Does the source have an author (either a person or an organization) or is it written anonymously?
- If the author is an organization, can you find other reputable sources that treat it as a reliable entity?
 - Does the organization provide a description of their mission and purpose?
 - Do they list staff and board members, and their relevant credentials?
- If the author is a person, do they present verifiable credentials? (professor at a university? researcher in a think tank? well-known practitioner?)
 - Have they published their work in reputable journals or magazines that you can find in WSA Library databases?
 - Have other authors written about this author's work in reputable books or journals?
 - Are they affiliated with reputable organizations that have been mentioned in books or articles found in WSA Library databases?



Is the content substantial and supported by evidence?

- Does the source go into reasonable depth? Are there so many ads on the page that they overwhelm the content?
- Are facts and statistics footnoted where necessary?
- Are their footnoted sources reliable?
- Is the site trying to sell you something? (Not necessarily bad, but be wary!)
- If they advocate a position, do they provide evidence to support it?



How current is the info?

- Does the content seem out-of-date?
- When was the web page last updated?
- Are sources cited also current?
- Are its links "live" or broken?

WHEN TO FACT CHECK?



You can't Fact Check everything you read or hear, but if a statement sounds too good, bad or strange to be true, start digging.

First step: See if a nonpartisan fact checking organization has already examined the statement.



How can you determine if a fact-checking website is nonpartisan and reliable? Ask yourself:

- Does the organization have a bias or a stake in the issue?
- Does the writer or the website stand to gain anything — like money or support — by coming to a particular conclusion?
- Does the article appear to have been sent out unedited? Are there errors in spelling or grammar?
- Does the author cite the original sources of data or information, rather than stories that cite that original data? (For example: the original source of CDC statistics is the CDC website, not an article that cites those CDC statistics.)
- Are the data, reports, polls, surveys, etc. cited by the writer reliable and up to date?

Nonpartisan Fact-Checking Websites in the US:

Fact-checking sites outside the US cover issues in their own countries, but may also examine US issues of importance to their country.

FactCheck.org - (Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania). An umbrella of fact checking websites:

FactCheck covers politics

SciCheck covers science

Viral Spiral covers internet rumors

FlackCheck, has an instructional aim with "resources designed to help viewers recognize flaws in arguments in general and political ads in particular. Video resources point out deception and incivility in political rhetoric."

Factchecker - Run by journalist Glenn Kessler of the *Washington Post*, this site assesses claims made by politicians or political advocacy groups.

Politifact - From the *Tampa Bay Times*. Researches and rates the accuracy of claims made by national, state and local elected officials, candidates, leaders of political parties and political activists.

Punditfact - From the *Tampa Bay Times*. Researches and rates the accuracy of claims by "...pundits, columnists, bloggers, political analysts, the hosts and guests of talk shows, and other members of the media."

Snopes - Researches urban legends, Internet rumors, e-mail forwards, and other stories of questionable or unknown origin.

WNYC's Breaking News Consumer's Handbooks - Instead of fact-checking specific stories, offers a growing collection of handbooks focused on identifying common misrepresentations in stories on broad topics such as Protests, Islamophobia, Drug Abuse, and more.

Nonpartisan Fact-Checking Websites Outside the US:



Fact-checking sites outside the US cover issues in their own countries, but may also examine US issues of importance to their country.

Duke Reporter's Lab - Duke University. Their fact-checking database links to over "...100 non-partisan organizations around the world that...assess the accuracy of statements made by public officials, political parties, candidates, journalists, news organizations, associations and other groups." Includes several dozen fact-checking sites in the US.

EU vs Disinformation: A site from the European Union, created to challenge disinformation coming out of Russia.

Full Fact - A nonprofit, independent fact-checking organization based in the UK.

Source: <https://guides.libs.uga.edu/c.php?g=571070&p=3936511>

West Sound Academy Databases: <https://libguides.westsoundacademy.org/library>