

FINDING RELEVANT AND RELIABLE SOURCES

You will probably find more sources than you can use, and you should always evaluate their relevance and reliability.

To find out if a source is relevant, skim the key parts of the text for names or terms related to your question or its answers. The key parts of a text are usually any section or chapter titled “introduction” or “conclusion,” any subheadings or chapter titles, and the first paragraph or two after each after subheading or chapter title.

Also, your evidence will not be persuasive if it comes from a source your readers don’t trust. You can’t judge a source until you read it, but there are signs of reliability. **To find out if a source is reliable**, consider whether you found it in a library’s collections or whether it seems like a work of high enough quality to be in a library.

Evaluating Online Sources

Look for the following signs of a reliable online source:

1. The site is sponsored by a **reputable organization**. Some sites supported by individuals are reliable; most are not.
2. It is related to a **reliable publisher or professional journal**.
3. It is **not an advocacy site**. It is not sponsored by an organization with a political or commercial agenda, and it avoids one-sided advocacy on a contested social issue.
4. It **does not make wild claims**, attack other researchers, or use abusive language.
5. It **does not make errors** of spelling, punctuation, or grammar.
6. It **says who is responsible** for maintaining the site and **when it was updated**. Trust a site only if careful readers would trust those who maintain it.
7. It is **not too glossy**. When a site has more graphics than words, its designers may care more about drawing you in than about presenting reliable information.

Finally, remember that biased or partisan sites often mimic the features of more reliable ones. If you’re not sure about a site, do a new search on some of its key terms and compare the sites you find with the original one. You can always ask a librarian for help.