

Methods of Writing Research Papers

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3rd Stage

Lecture Ten

Reading and Evaluating Sources

With your research and writing, you will enter the intellectual discussions found in numerous places, but questions will arise quickly during your reading:

- a) How do I find and evaluate the best, most appropriate sources?
- b) How can I evaluate a source by analyzing its parts or just part of a source?
- c) How do I respond to the source information?

One answer to all three questions is this: Be skeptical and cautious. Do not accept every printed word as being the truth. This chapter cuts to the heart of the matter:

- a) Finding and evaluating reliable sources
- b) Using a mix of primary and secondary sources
- c) Responding to the sources
- d) Preparing an annotated bibliography or review of literature

Constantly review and verify to your own satisfaction the words of your sources, especially in this age of electronic publication.

A scholarly article usually appears in a journal you access through the library's databases. With a journal article, you may feel confident in

its authenticity because the authors of journal articles write for academic honour, they document all sources, and they publish through university presses and academic organizations that use a jury to judge an article before its publication. Thus, a journal article about child abuse found in *Child Development* or in *Journal of Marriage and Family* should be reliable, but an article about child abuse in a popular magazine may be less reliable in its facts and opinions. Usually, but not in every case, you can identify a journal in these ways:

- a) The journal does not have a colourful cover; in fact, the table of contents is often displayed on the cover.
- b) No colourful drawings or photography introduce each journal article, just a title and the name of the author(s).
- c) The word journal often appears in the title (e.g., *American Journal of Sociology*).
- d) The yearly issues of a journal are bound into a book.
- e) Usually, the pages of a journal are numbered continuously through all issues for a year (unlike magazines, which are paged anew with each issue).