GERMANNA
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FOR EXCELLENCE

Identifying Scholarly Sources

When conducting research, it can often be difficult to distinguish between a scholarly source and a non-scholarly source, so it is helpful to understand the specific criteria that indicate the credibility of a source. By understanding what makes up a scholarly source, one can more easily compile relevant topic information and ensure the information was reviewed by known experts. This handout will define what a scholarly source is, explain how to determine source credibility and usefulness, examine a few other types of sources that are available for use when doing research, and provide tips for identifying non-credible sources.

Scholarly Sources

Scholarly sources are typically found within library databases or other scholarly databases. They are sources written by an author who has a specialization in and/or extensive knowledge of the subject about which they are writing. Scholarly sources can be peer-reviewed, meaning that other scholars with equally extensive knowledge have read the article to ensure that the information is correct. Scholarly sources provide useful information that is considered trustworthy because of the author's credentials. In the early research stage, scholarly sources can serve as reliable resources for finding information that is both credible and accurate. Scholarly sources can be found within the Germanna Community College library databases as well as through Google Scholar.

The CRAAP Test

The acronym 'CRAAP' stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. The CRAAP Test is an effective way of evaluating the credibility and usefulness of a source in a reliable manner. By establishing better research habits, one is able to find sources that strengthen their paper and promote the exploration of new perspectives related to the topic.

Currency focuses on when the information was published. The information used in academic papers should be current to ensure that what is being discussed is not out of date. When conducting research for most disciplines, the information should be no more than ten years old; however, when researching science topics, the information should be no more than two years old. It is important to always confirm research dates with your instructor to ensure how current they want the information to be.

Relevance focuses on how the information relates to what is being researched. This helps determine if the source being considered will provide information or insight on the topic.

Authority determines from where the information comes. This step should focus on finding out more about the author of the source that is being evaluated. It is important to investigate the author's credentials and qualifications to help ensure they can provide accurate information on the topic.

Accuracy looks at how correctly the information is presented within the source. This is very important because it helps determine from where the information came, if the information has any kind of bias, and if it has been reviewed by a scholarly peer.

Purpose helps to evaluate why the information exists and what its purpose is, such as to inform, teach, entertain, or persuade. It is also necessary to determine if the information is fact or opinion in order to recognize any views which may contain personal biases.

Other Types of Sources

There are various kinds of non-scholarly sources that can be used when doing research. For example, a researcher focusing on non-profit organizations may find it useful to use organization sources. On the other hand, if the researcher's focus is on law, a government source would be more useful. An education source might also be appropriate if the information comes from the academic department with expertise in that specific subject. These types of non-scholarly sources may still be accurate and useful.

Government sources are websites ending in .gov and are funded by different government groups. This type of source can be useful in looking for data or statistics, information on laws or regulations, and opinions from experts who have studied the topic that is being researched. Much of the information from these sources is accurate and kept up to date in order to provide the most recent content.

Education sources are websites ending in .edu and come from educational institutions, which can range from the elementary level to the college level. When looking at these sources, it is important to note from where the information comes. If the information comes from a specific department or center that is associated with the school, it is more likely to be accurate.

Organization sources are websites ending in .org, and they provide information on non-profit organizations, foundations, or charities. These sources are similar to education sources, so it is

also important to investigate the organization and the source of their information to determine if it is reliable. These types of sources can be helpful in gathering more information on a specific organization and obtaining more information on the topic that is being researched.

Note: While the above-mentioned sources are considered non-scholarly, they may contain reliable information. However, when looking at non-scholarly sources, it is important to determine if the person or group publishing the information has enough of a credible background on the subject for the information to be trustworthy.

Web pages such as Wikipedia and personal blogs can contain information that does not have an author associated with the page. Therefore, readers cannot verify that the information provided is accurate or reliable. Another issue a student should consider when using non-scholarly sources, such as Wikipedia or personal blogs, is that anyone can edit these web pages. With public editing, there is a greater risk of irrelevant or untrustworthy information from authors who have no experience or prior knowledge related to the topic. Unreliable authors can provide information with the goal of persuading readers rather than informing them of the topic on which the web page is based. This can place a bias on the readers' research process and limit their gathering of neutral information.