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Delivered:

“Yet Forget Not, That I Am An Ass.[[1]](#footnote-1)”: How To Conduct Accurate And Ethical Documentation Research

# Introduction

## Conducting research does not have to be an intimidating or daunting task. Instead, it can be an opportunity to let creative curiosity guide one into discovery. This presentation will cover methods of research, vetting sources, and systems of citation.

# Sources

In regard to research, sources fit into three categories, and they are primary, secondary, and tertiary.

## A primary source is any first-hand information, be it a document or a piece of material culture, created in the time period in question.

### There is no such thing as an unbiased work. The author is a human being that views the world though their own personal lens made up of their life experiences and therefore, can only offer a biased viewpoint. However, their bias may or may not affect their work to a degree that it impacts its usefulness. It is vital to understand that for each publication produced, a narrative is created.

### The translator, author, or editor may not have been entirely accurate in their work.

#### Foundational documents that create a methodology are useful but contemporary scholars will likely have published commentary as to the effectiveness of that methodology or an argument including contemporary findings.

#### When working with an older, foundational document, the committed researcher will also seek contemporary works citing that document.

### The scope of a work, by its very nature, will be limited. A book or journal article can only cover so much of a given topic in only so much detail.

### For sources not originally composed in English, the translation of primary sources can be problematic.

#### That a work is translated does not mean that there is a word-for-word replacement of the original language. Translation is an art and like any art, there are multiple approaches.

#### The translator has made a series of decisions on the reader’s behalf – decisions of which that the reader has no knowledge unless detailed by the translator as an introductory part of the work.

#### The researcher must be aware that an act of translation can fundamentally alter the way that the original work is perceived. Thus, there may be more than one translation of a given work available and researchers should in this case compare and contrast the two different translations as a part of their research.

### Some primary sources are not direct translations from the origin language to English; they have been translated into multiple languages before being translated into English. The text may be completely divorced from the original.

#### In cases where the original is lost, a foreign language translation, later translated into English, may be the only evidence available. .

#### A concrete example of this would be the many incarnations of the Bible.

## Secondary Sources are one step away from primary sources.

### A secondary source is an interpretation of primary source.

#### It is the archaeologist’s conclusions about artifacts as written in their monograph.

#### The drawings an artist makes based on artifacts or paintings are secondary sources also.

#### This distinction is made because secondary information is not a substitution for a primary source but is instead a commentary or critique.

### However, secondary sources are useful.

#### They expose the researcher to past or current trends in thought and or perspectives from other disciplines.

#### It is vital that the researcher is sure to check the publishing date of secondary works.

##### What seemed a plausible conclusion in 1920 may be disproved by now. Newer research on a primary source may be available.

##### Research is an evidence-based science, and as such, evolves as more data is introduced.

##### Secondary sources are a good place for the researcher to explore once they have exhausted their own assessment on the primary source.

## Tertiary Sources are two steps away from a primary source.

### A tertiary source is a work based on secondary information and is a further step removed from the primary source.

#### Most researchers use a combination of secondary sources and primary works and the documentation that results from the previous two produces a tertiary source.

#### Tertiary sources can be useful, as authors within this category often critique and further examine primary sources, shedding new light upon both.

### It is not advisable to base research on tertiary sources, or to go beyond a critique of a secondary source, as they are so far removed from the primary source.

#### When one removes their research too far from the primary material, vagueness sets in - a situation which is not conducive to good research.

#### The best research has a good mix of primary and secondary sources but uses tertiary sources sparingly if at all.

# Finding and Vetting Sources

The right source will be one vetted for legitimacy and accuracy. This requires critical thinking. Just because an individual has published a book or written an article upon a subject does not mean it is credible. A good researcher will take pains to determine if the information is accurate by deciding if it has come from a reputable source. If a work is not produced by a legitimate source, no matter how attractive it may seem, it should be discarded.

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## Types of Resources

### Books published by university publishing houses such has Harvard, Oxford, or any other accredited university typically yield accurate information that has met a certain amount of academic rigor.

### Articles come in two different types.

#### Peer review journals offer articles that have been tested for accuracy as well as what they contribute to the field at large.

#### Non-peer review sources of an article type should be met with heavy skepticism, if engaged with at all..

### Opinion pieces, newspaper articles, and other multi-media sources must be met with skepticism and the sources cited within these works checked for accuracy.

#### This includes YouTube videos produced by non-academics outside of a university environment.

#### This also includes Podcasts done by non-academics meant for a general audience.

## Where to Find Resources

### Local Libraries are meant to serve a broad swath of interests and at a very basic level.

#### Researchers can begin their work at a local library and use that as a jumping off point in order to delve into a topic more deeply.

#### Research librarians are there to assist researchers in finding sources that are both present within the library (physically and digitally) along with filing inter-library loan requests on the behalf of patrons.

### University libraries can be accessible by non-university students. Many grant borrower cards for a donation or fee that open up access to part if not all of the library’s resources.

##### This includes access to physical books.

##### This also includes access to subscription-based journal articles and online databases.

### The internet is truly the wild, wild west. Anyone can publish anything for any reason and there is no bar for entry. Exercise extreme caution as misinformation runs rampant.

#### Wikipedia provides information that is not vetted by subject specialists as evidenced by the fact that the core concept of the website allows anyone to edit any article sans qualifications and marginalizes the work of women and people of color.

##### While many may find this website good for basic information on a general topic, it is riddled with errors, inaccuracy, and propaganda.

##### Use this source with extreme prejudice, including the citations.

#### Google Scholar can be useful but does not delineate between articles that have been peer reviewed and come from ethical, responsible sources and ones that do not.

##### A researcher should check the publication date, the publisher, and author of any material located.

##### Ideally cross-reference any findings with other articles to check for validity.

#### Academia.edu is available as a non-subscription model as well as a subscription model.

##### The non-subscription model offers no way of searching strictly for peer-review articles.

##### The subscription model may offer this option.

# Citation

Good, quality, ethical citation is vital to any text that a researcher might produce. There are predominantly three different citation systems available for researchers to use. They are published and maintained by the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS).

## Why Citation is Important

### Citing sources validates any claim that is made in the document.

#### All scholarship requires research and that research will introduce the researcher to new ideas. Those ideas carry little to no weight without the proper authorities to back them up.

#### If a scholar cites a previously unknown theory, most audiences will demand facts to back the statements up.

### Citing sources properly removes any confusion regarding authorship.

#### If a researcher includes something that is not an original thought of theirs or considered to be common knowledge, and does not cite their source, that is plagiarism.

#### Plagiarism is an academic non-starter and will undermine your argument as a writer and put into question the validity of your research.

### Citing sources correctly allows the reader of the research to track down the sources used, should they choose to do so, for their own edification.

#### Readers may have questions you have not answered.

#### Readers may wish to read your sources themselves to check your work.

### Each style guide is considered a system, meaning, they have their own rules for how a page is laid out, the margins, the title page, and how information is distributed in paragraph and topic organization as well as citation.

## Modern Language Association (MLA)

### Uses parenthetical references either before the text or with the page numbers in parenthesis for books and articles – web sources omit this.

### It subsequently uses a works cited page that is organized to include more details.

## American Psychological Association (APA)

### Uses parenthetical references either before the text or with the year of publication for books and articles.

### It subsequently uses a reference list, organized to give more detail.

## Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)

### Uses parenthetical references that include the author’s name, year, and page number.

### It utilizes footnotes for bibliographic purposes.

# Suggested Reading

## Style Guides

### The Purdue Owl Website will provide basic citation system information for the big three. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\_owl.html

### This is the address for the MLA Style Guide: <http://www.mla.org/>

### This is the address for the APA Style Guide: <https://www.apa.org>

### This is the address for the CMS Style Guide:[*https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html*](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html)

## Guidelines for Evaluating Web Sources

### University of Maine: <https://usm.maine.edu/library/checklist-evaluating-web-resources>

### Kent State: <https://www.library.kent.edu/criteria-evaluating-web-resources>

# Works Cited

## Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado About Nothing.* Ed. Zitner, Sheldon P. Oxford University Press 1st Ed. Oxford. 2008.

1. (Shakespeare Act 4 Scene 2, Lines 70-71) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)