Types of Sources

- **Primary Documents**
  * Original research articles
  * Letters, diaries
  * Raw data
- **Secondary Documents**
  * Interpretations of primary documents and data
- **Reviews**
  * Overviews of literature or research in an area
  * Opinion pieces on a specific work (book or movie reviews)
- **Editorials / Letters to the editor**
  * Opinion pieces meant to influence readers

Formats of Sources

Different formats of sources have different strengths and weaknesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Often Current</td>
<td>Anyone can publish on the web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>Current Events</td>
<td>Not an in depth analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>Show current topics in language for the general public</td>
<td>Often don’t show where the information came from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Journals</td>
<td>Analysis meant for people in the field</td>
<td>Can be highly technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Journals</td>
<td>Current peer reviewed high quality research</td>
<td>Written with an assumption of subject knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>In depth &amp; comprehensive analysis of the topic</td>
<td>Can be dated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Variety of information presented in an alternative format</td>
<td>Can be hard to determine authority and cite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, visit our online Research Resources Guide:

libguides.uwc.edu/BRNresearch

“Is this a good source or not?”

How to evaluate sources and identify reliable information.
**EVALUATING SOURCES**

**Identifying Scholarly Articles**

Scholarly articles...
- Have a list of references at the end of the text
- Often feature an abstract (summary) at the beginning of the article
- Always list the author's name
- Are detailed and are usually several pages long
- Are many times peer-reviewed (or refereed)
- Are aimed at scholars in a particular field (biology, history, philosophy, etc.)

Popular magazines...
- Often don’t tell you who wrote the article or any of the sources they used
- Are usually brief and offer only general or superficial coverage of a topic
- Have lots of ads and are usually printed on glossy paper
- Are written for a general audience
- Are often great sources for current, general information on a topic
- Examples include: *Time, Newsweek, National Geographic.*

**Evaluation Questions to Ask**

- Is the source appropriate for the assignment?
- **Authority:**
  - What are the qualifications the responsible party has on this subject?
  - Are you able to verify that the information is accurate? (Does the author cite their sources?)
- **Purpose:**
  - Can you determine why the source was written? Explain? Persuade? Inform? Entertain?
- **What is the potential bias of the author?**
  - If the source is biased can you find an other source to balance the perspective?
- **Accuracy:**
  - Are there sources listed?
  - Can you find obvious errors in spelling, punctuation, etc.?
  - Can you verify the information in another reliable source?
- **Coverage:**
  - How in-depth is the information or material available?
- **Dates:**
  - When was the source originally published?
  - If the source is a revised edition, can you tell how much of it was revised or was it just republished?

**Additional Questions for Websites**

- **Authority:**
  - Can you tell who created and maintains the site? Anyone can publish to the web.
- **Purpose:**
  - If you can’t tell what person or group created the site, that’s a bad sign. If you can, take note of any potential bias the creator might have (ex. *The Sierra Club* site would be pro-environment).
- **Currency/Dates:**
  - Can you tell when the site was updated last, and if it is being maintained regularly?
  - If there are charts and graphs, can you tell when that content is from?
  - Beware out of date content; abandoned web pages are common!
- **Validity/Reliability/Sources:**
  - If claims of fact are made, is there any documentation to support these claims? (ex. a list of the sources used, references to studies cited, etc.)
  - Are there obvious errors on the site?
- **Navigation:**
  - Is the site well designed and easy to use?
  - Are the links broken?
- **Domain:**
  - What is the domain? Noting the domain gives clues to the probable content of the website.
  - .com (commercial)
  - .edu (education)
  - .mil (military)
  - .gov (government)
  - .org (organization)
  - .biz (business)