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ETLA 100: TRANSITIONS I
Evaluating, Documenting, and Annotating Sources:
Some Favorite Librarians' Resources

Evaluating Your Sources

When evaluating a source it is important to consider the following criteria:

1. **Authority:** Who are the author(s) of the source? What are their qualifications? What else have they written? Are they overly biased? Are they often cited by others writing about the same subject? Information on the author can often be found in a bio on the book jacket, in book reviews, and in databases such as the [Biography in Context](#) or the [Literature Resource Center](#) (which contains *Contemporary Authors*). Information on his or her qualifications can also be found on the website of any university or organization website that the author is affiliated with. [Google Scholar](#) (scholar.google.com) and any of the databases using the EBSCO interface ([Academic Search Complete](#), [Education Research Complete](#), [Humanities International Complete](#), etc.) can be used to find other authors that cite the original source.
2. **Publisher or Source:** Does the source come from a university press or government agency? Is the publication peer reviewed? Is it advertisement driven? If so, are there any conflicts of interest? For print publications the publisher will be printed on the title page (or in the record for the electronic version of print publications). For internet sources, it is useful to look at the domain suffix (.com, .org, .gov, .edu) and the site host.
3. **Objectivity:** Is the source overly (or openly) biased? Does it use emotional rhetoric? Is it well researched?
4. **Quality:** Is the source well organized? Are the main points clearly presented? Are there grammatical or typographical errors? Are their sources well documented? Book reviews can be a great source for evaluating quality. Some library databases such as [JSTOR](#) and [Academic Search Complete](#) can be limited to search for only book reviews. Facts and statistics can be checked against another reliable source. Also, check the bibliography. Are their sources authoritative and objective?
5. **Relevance:** Is the source relevant to your research? Does it meet the requirements of your assignment? How does it relate to other research on the topic? Is it at a level that is useful to you?
6. **Timeliness:** How recent is the source? Have more recent events made the source outdated? Does your topic require timely information? For printed materials the publication date will be on the title page. Also check to see if there is a previous edition. If the source is an internet site, check for a "created on" or "last updated" date. If none is listed the publication date may be unknown and the usability of the source might be questionable.
7. **Audience:** Is the material, online or printed, aimed at a scholarly or general audience?

If your source is a periodical, the chart below might be helpful in determining if it is scholarly or popular. Knowing the difference can help you recognize which periodicals would be more relevant to a particular project.

Characteristic	Scholarly	Popular
Purpose	Published in order to transmit the findings of original research in a field, to expand that field's base of published knowledge and to act as a stepping stone for further research.	Published to inform, entertain, or persuade.
Audience	Undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, practitioners, faculty, and others with a specialized knowledge of the field.	General public; those without specialized knowledge.
Author	Articles written by researchers, professionals or experts in the field.	Articles often written by reporters or other paid staff writers or by freelance writers.
Review Process	Scholarly journals are known as "peer-reviewed" or "refereed" because their articles are screened and approved by researchers and experts in the field (the author's "peers") before they are accepted for publication. Reviewers usually do not have any affiliation with the journal that they are reviewing an article for. Only articles of superior quality and value to the field will pass the review process.	Articles are reviewed and approved for publication by the periodical's editor.
Publication Frequency	Scholarly journals are usually published monthly, bimonthly or quarterly (4 times a year). Scholarly journals emphasize quality over quantity in the articles that they publish.	Popular periodicals generate many articles and are usually published daily, weekly or monthly.

(From the Lucy Scribner Library website located at <http://libguides.skidmore.edu/content.php?pid=405243&sid=3316923>)

There are other ways to determine if a periodical is scholarly. One way is to check the “scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals” box on the [Academic Search Complete](#) search screen to limit your results to academic-oriented articles. Another way is to look up a periodical title in [Ulrich's Periodicals Directory](#) database. It will tell you if your title is peer-reviewed (sometimes listed as “refereed”) or not.

One of your texts, *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker which is also available on permanent reserve, contains useful information in the **R2** section of the **Researching** chapter. Cornell University's Olin & Uris Libraries staff members have prepared [Critically Analyzing Information Sources](#), whose content is very helpful in examining your sources. **Widener University's** Wolfgram Library has a good YouTube [tutorial](#) on evaluating web sites, in which the [Martin Luther King.org](#) and [The King Center](#) sites are analyzed. Clicking on [Research Tips](#) on the [library home page](#) will take you to some helpful sites on evaluating sources, and annotating and formatting bibliographies. Even though most of these sites say “online information,” the same criteria apply to print information.

Documenting Your Sources

There are many great web sites that explain why you must document your sources and show you the various documentation styles. Below are a few web sites that the librarians think are particularly good, and they all incorporate 2009 changes in both the MLA and APA styles. Remember, when you use another person's exact words, unique ideas, or paraphrase too closely, you must attribute them to their sources. Not doing this is committing **plagiarism**, a form of academic misconduct. It is a serious infraction of Emory & Henry's Academic Code and Honor Code. Also, in the academic world, showing where your information originated is the standard expectation.

Long Island University's [Citation Guides](http://liu.cwp.libguides.com/sb.php?subject_id=13235)
(http://liu.cwp.libguides.com/sb.php?subject_id=13235)

The color coding makes it easy to distinguish the different elements of a citation.

Purdue University Online Writing Lab's (OWL) [MLA Formatting and Style Guide](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
(<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>)

Scroll down to "Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Format." For the [APA documentation](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/) style, go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.

University of California Berkeley Library's [Citing Your Sources](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/citations.html)
(<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/citations.html>)

In addition to clear examples, there is a good explanation of why you need to cite sources.

Copies of *A Writer's Reference*, the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, and Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers* are available on **permanent reserve**—just ask at the Circulation Desk.

Preparing an Annotated Bibliography

You've found sources, online and in print. You've scrutinized and evaluated them on how pertinent they are to your presentation. You've wrestled them into MLA- or APA-style. Now comes the hard part: annotating them. Just what is annotating anyway? According to the [Oxford English Dictionary](#), the word is derived from Latin (big surprise!) and means "to add or make notes," and was first used as a verb in 1733 in the sense of adding information or commentary to scholarly information (as a noun, annotation has been in use since the 1520s). Below is a sample from Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*. Note: this annotated bibliography note is in the **MLA** style with the **2016 update**. For APA or Chicago style, please consult your Hacker book, the APA or Chicago style guides in the library, or some of the sources in this guide.

Fishman, Charles. *The Wal-Mart Effect: How the World's Most Powerful Company Really Works—and How It's Transforming the American Economy*. Penguin Press, 2006.

In *The Wal-Mart Effect*, author Charles Fishman attempts to study the company's effect on small business, local economies, and the U.S. economy in general. In 2004, Fishman was awarded the New York Press Club award for "The Wal-Mart You Don't Know", an article that was expanded into this book. The first edition of the book was written with no cooperation from Wal-Mart (Fishman's requests originally went unanswered) but after the release of the book he was invited by the company to visit the headquarters and he added a new chapter from what he learned to the paperback edition. The sixth chapter, dealing with the study of Wal-Mart, was particularly helpful in beginning my research and led me to several other good sources.

If you have questions on how to prepare an annotation, what information should be included, etc., the following web sites should help you. They all have good samples, including an actual annotation.

Concordia University's [How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography](#)

Cornell University's [How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography](#)

Earlham College's [What Is an Annotated Bibliography?](#)

Memorial University of Newfoundland's [How to Write Annotated Bibliographies](#)

Purdue University Online Writing Lab's (OWL) [Annotated Bibliographies](#)

Simon Fraser University's [How to Write an Annotated Bibliography](#)

Note: on some of these web sites, you will see links to email or chat with a librarian at that college or university. **Please do NOT contact the library staff at these institutions:**

- but **DO** visit Kelly Library (reference assistance available 8am – 7pm Monday through Thursday; 8am – 5pm Friday)
- email us (askalibrarian@ehc.edu)
- phone (ext. 6208) us (Jane Caldwell, Holly McCormick, Jody Hanshew, or Janet Kirby)
- check the library webpage under [Research Tips](#) for more links to help pages and websites for all these topics.

Good luck with your papers, presentations, and annotated bibliographies.

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