

GS102 Tutorial 1: Identifying academic sources for research assignments

Hello everyone.

In this video, we'll discuss how you can identify credible academic sources that you can use for your assignments.

Your syllabus stipulates you need to find 5 peer reviewed articles/book chapters for the Annotated Bibliography assignment.

You also need "a minimum of three peer reviewed materials" for your Argumentative essay.

I'm sure that many of you are in the process of looking up articles.

You may have got some online already, but when it comes to researching and writing the annotated bibliography assignment there are some questions that you should always be asking about the sources that you're using.

And that is: Is this a valid academic source?

One of the problems that students encounter every year is not using academic sources in their research papers.

"Academic, peer-reviewed, refereed, and scholarly."

I'll use the terms interchangeably in this video.

In general these terms that we see on the screen all refer to materials that have been reviewed through the peer reviewed publishing process.

Now you may have encountered the term peer review previously, but it will be helpful to know what that term means in an academic context.

Sometimes you'll hear your professors say in class:

"I want you to use primarily academic sources for your paper."

"You should only be consulting the peer-reviewed literature as you're doing research."

"I want you to use scholarly books or book chapters." And occasionally, you may hear a professor refer to "refereed" articles or books, but this term is used only rarely.

Essentially, peer review involves experts in a field checking material before it's published in a scholarly work, such as a journal article or an academic book.

Here's what the publishing process looks like as a visual.

A researcher submits a paper to an academic journal and their work is checked by experts in their field.

They send comments anonymously back to the editor, who sends those comments to the researcher.

The researcher will then revise their paper, send it to the editor, and re-submit it to the journal.

The process here is generalized and simplified, but it's extensive, time consuming, and lengthy in comparison to publication in a popular press or online newspaper.

In comparison, what I'm terming the non-academic publishing process is a little more straightforward.

A writer sends an article to an editor who may make some changes and then publish it to the reader, and this process could theoretically happen in a very short time.

So that's the difference between peer review and non-peer reviewed publishing.

But how can you tell what materials are peer reviewed or scholarly?

There are some quick ways that our databases use, and you may have found some things on the Internet.

But I will point out some of those specifically in a later video, and they are not foolproof.

Also, they only get you to academic journal articles and not books.

We need to know how to identify academic materials whether they are available to us electronically or not and that's what we'll talk about next.

With respect to identifying scholarly materials I use three general criteria: the author, the publisher, and the documentation.

There are more, but there are three basic questions that you can ask about the document that you have in hand.

Who is the author and what are their credentials?

Who's the publisher?

What kind of documentation is provided in the source document?

The first criterion is the author.

A scholarly or academic author is a recognized expert in their field.

Scholarly, or academic authors often have advanced degrees like a doctoral degree and are very often based at University, College, or research institute.

They also use scholarly books, or scholarly journal articles, to communicate the findings of their research to other experts in their field, or the broader academic community.

When looking at a journal article it's sometimes fairly easy to determine if the author is a scholar or not.

The author's title and or their affiliation is often given somewhere on the first page of the article.

This is an example of a journal article where the author's university affiliation is given.

Trying to determine the credentials for the author of a book is a little bit more difficult but not impossible.

Try to see if you can find any information about the author online.

For example, do they have a web page at a university, a faculty page?

Do they have any kind of online profile that would indicate their expertise in the area that you're interested in?

With respect to the publisher, academic materials are often published by a recognized university press and this can include both books and journals.

There are many examples of university presses, and here are just a few.

If you find a book in the library that's published by university press, there's a good chance that it is a scholarly work.

But sometimes it's not apparent by the name of the publisher if they publish scholarly

materials.

For example, these presses all publish scholarly books, but they're not university presses.

So, if you find a book in the library and you're uncertain as to whether it's an academic book or not, the one thing I say to students is do a little bit of research about the publisher.

Look to see if they have a website and visit their "About" page.

Most scholarly publishers will indicate on their about page that they are a publisher of academic books, or scholarly books, or even peer reviewed books.

The third criterion is documentation, or how the author documents sources of claims that are made in their text.

Scholarly articles and books use citations, or detailed footnotes in the text, to refer to information found in another work.

Scholarly articles and books can include an extensive bibliography at the end of each chapter, or at the end of the book.

This documentation indicates that the author has done detailed research in the topic that they're writing about and is interested in communicating where they've drawn on other authors information sources to add to their argument.

This is one of the hallmarks of scholarly communication.

We've gone over some valid academic sources that you can use.

What should you avoid?

You've probably been warned about Wikipedia already.

Wikipedia articles can point to other good sources themselves, but they would not be considered as valid sources to use in your paper because they are not peer reviewed.

Now similarly book reviews even those that come from an academic journal are not valid sources because they are not original research.

Blog posts, again even if they're from an academic website would not be valid because they also are not peer reviewed.

Lastly newspaper articles would fall into this category as well.

In summary, you should be using academic sources for your assignment.

These are sources that have been peer reviewed.

When trying to determine if a source is a valid academic one, you can ask:

Who's the author?

Who's the publisher?

How are their claims documented?

I'll show you in a follow up video how to look for valid sources and how to determine if they answer your research question?

If you have any questions about what I've gone over please feel free to contact me at my work email address listed here or through the links provided in your "My Learning Space" course.