Guide to Online Sources

Many sources you will use for your research papers will be found online, so it is important to know which are reliable and which are not. Whether or not a source is suitable also depends on the type of assignment you are doing.

Reliable

- **Online Journal Articles Found on a Database**
  These are the best sources for college level papers. They often are peer-reviewed, which means they have been looked at and chosen to be published by other writers in the field.

- **News Website or Newspaper**
  This source is likely reliable, but could be biased. It should not be used for the most formal papers or papers that call for scholarly articles.

- **Magazine articles**
  This source is probably reliable, but will likely be even more biased than a newspaper. Magazines could be suitable for some papers, but not ones requiring scholarly research.

- **Government Websites**
  These sources are usually reliable, but generally are not authored by any one person. Typically they only provide broad information, but they can be a good source of statistics or facts.

- **Websites That End in “.edu”**
  Because these sources come from school websites, these are also usually reliable.

Sometimes Reliable

- **Websites That End in “.org”**
  These are websites that belong to non-profit organizations such as the ASPCA or the USO. Though they are usually biased, these sources can often give you an insider view of an issue.

- **Websites That End in “.com”**
  You should always be wary of company blogs or websites that have a “.com.” If these websites have an author, they may be more reliable, but you should always weigh websites like this against other sources you have. If a “.com” is the only source that makes a specific point, that point may not be factual.

See unreliable sources on the back of this page.
Unreliable/Should Not be Cited

- **Diary-type Websites or Personal Blogs**
  These are almost all personal opinion and there is usually no support for the claims made at such websites.

- **Websites That Sound Overtly Biased**
  Unless you are specifically searching for opinion-based research, websites with titles like “People Against Cars” or “Sugar is Always Dangerous” are probably going to be too biased for your paper.

- **Dictionaries and Encyclopedias--Including Wikipedia**
  These sources are not necessarily unreliable, but generally you should attempt to find sources that are not just reference books. Some of those sources, however, might lead you to more reliable and usable sources that will give you more interesting information.

*When in doubt, you should always ask your professor about a source.*