Finding & Evaluating Your Sources – A Guide

This exercise should be done in conjunction with the following pages of The McGraw-Hill Handbook:

- Section 16 “Finding and Managing Print and Online Sources” and Section 18 “Evaluating Sources” (273-303 in 3rd ed. and 259-280 in 2nd ed. / 304-313 in 3rd ed. and 289-298 in 2nd ed.).
- Section 21 “Working with Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism” in 3rd ed. (328) and 20b “Create an Annotated Bibliography” in 2nd ed. (319). Section includes information on paraphrasing and summarizing without plagiarizing.

EXPLORATION
The step is moving into research, and discovering credible sources with which to engage and expand. By doing so responsibly, you’ll be sure to consider those sources’ credibility and relevance from the beginning.

Step 1: Consider your ideas/views on your possible topics. Sift your claims and points for unsupported facts and begin listing possible keywords regarding those subjects and facts. Search Google for ideas on keywords and subject matter. Check Google listings (such as Wikipedia) for sources that THEY CITE. To sift Google for more credible websites, try typing the desired URL, such as ‘.gov’, ‘.edu’, or ‘.org’, and then your keywords: site:.edu/.gov/.org [insert keywords here]. You should also try Google Scholar.

Step 2: Visit the major academic databases (ProQuest, Academic Search Complete – via Galileo) and Lexis-Nexis, on our Library Research Guide (see Georgia View), and try to locate that same material, using search terms garnered from the Google searches. (The off-campus password for Galileo can be found on the Research Guide link for our GV Course site, or ask a librarian.)

EVALUATION
You must evaluate each of your sources for credibility, content, and how they may fit into your essay.
MOST website sources are unreliable/lack credibility. Use the handbook pages above on source evaluation.

Step 1: As you find each potential source, take the time to scan its date, origin, authorship, and other aspects of credibility. Then, scan it’s Abstract (if it’s a journal article or study, a summary is provided), or its first 2 pages, to get a feel for what its claims are.

Step 2: If this is a website, turn to the green centerfold in your handbook and use it to help you locate the key information that you need to assess credibility (also using section 18 on Evaluating Sources). If you CANNOT find this info in your source, the source is questionable!

CITATION
Good researching also means keeping good, running record of your sources AS YOU FIND THEM – even if you may not use them in the end.

Step 1: Turn to Section 21 for taking good research notes, and also Part 4, Section 23 of The McGraw-Hill Handbook, “MLA Documentation Style”, and locate the appropriate instructions for citing each type of
source that you have. A directory to sample references for in-text citation (how to cite within your essay)
can be found on page 369 of 3rd ed. and 344 of 2nd ed. There is also a quick guide INSERT for citing all
source types between pages 360-361 (3rd) 342-343 (2nd). If you used Word ‘Reference Manager’,
CHECK that your existing citations are in fact correct – You have to understand correct citation in order to
use that program because otherwise, Word WILL get it wrong.

Step 2: On your computer, begin a blank Microsoft Word document. This will be your working
bibliography with notes about your sources (an annotated bibliography of sorts). Following the
instructions in Section 21 (3rd ed.) or 23c “MLA List of Works Cited” (2nd ed. on page 355, and Section 20b
“create an annotated bibliography”), convert your Works Cited page into an annotated bibliography or
notes system in which you include a short paragraph note evaluating the source (note: you do not place
quotes around the words “Works Cited” or “Annotated Bibliography” on the actual document).

A “Works Cited” Verses A “Bibliography”??

We should all construct bibliographies in our preliminary research stage. Part of being a responsible
writer is having a good process of evaluation and notation between the bibliography stage
(researching) and the works cited stage (writing). These sources may not become part of your final
paper, thus they are bibliography sources for now.

Rules change for different disciplines, but for MLA, think of it this way: biblio comes from the Latin for
“book”, -ography indicates “the study of”. So, a “bibliography” list is simply a selection of books that you
have studied in order to compose, or during the process of composing, your essay. It does NOT mean
that each text has been used or cited in that essay. A “Works Cited”, on the other hand, means exactly
that. Only those texts that you have cited in your essay should appear in your Works Cited page.

Including sources in a Works Cited for which no in-text or parenthetical citation appears in your essay is
misleading and confusing to readers and implies that you have plagiarized those sources.