

In-Class Activity: Evaluating Information to Include in Your Research

Throughout your college career and in your daily life, you will need to find, evaluate, and synthesize information to make decisions and inform your thinking about a certain topic. Your professors will often ask you to use scholarly, academic sources like peer-reviewed journal articles in your research; but, non-academic sources can also be valuable in your research. It is important to consider what type of source you are using (book, blog post, newspaper article, scholarly journal), and how the format of that source informs its credibility, relevance, and authority. A blog post can offer a critical, popular perspective on a topic that you may not discover from an academic journal. However, an academic journal article will provide detailed research that has been reviewed by other scholars in the field before publication.

This assignment will help you explore different types of sources and think through how to evaluate sources you may want to use in your paper.

Scenario:

(You will not be writing a research paper - the following is a scenario that sets the stage for your in-class activity.)

Your professor has assigned a research paper requiring you to investigate an important local issue. You have decided to **research the hog farming industry in North Carolina and its impact on local water supply**. You begin to explore the local communities' relationship with hog farming, and wonder: Are there health risks associated with living or working near a hog farm? Do hog farms provide an economic boon to local communities? Are there long-term environmental concerns about the traditional method of hog farming?

As you begin to explore information on this topic, you quickly develop a long list of relevant sources, from environmental groups, social justice advocates, industry representatives, interviews with local hog farmers, scholarly journal articles, and books, to name a few. The sources you have collected are represented on your **SOURCE CARDS**.

Activity:

Each small group will receive a subset of the **SOURCE CARDS**. You will have ten minutes to read through the information on each card to get to know your sources. Using the questions on the back of this page to guide your discussion, evaluate each source. In what way is this source authoritative? How is it relevant to your research question? What are its limitations? After evaluating each source, choose **TWO SOURCE CARDS** that you would want to use in your research paper.

Present your findings to the class: Provide a brief description of the **SOURCE CARDS** you were given, explain how you evaluated your sources, and **why** your group selected the **TWO SOURCE CARDS** you would use in your paper.

Guiding Questions for Source Evaluation:

- Who is the author, and what makes the author an authority on the topic?
- Is the source sponsored or published by a reputable organization?
- What point of view does the author represent?
- Is there bias or a slant given to the information provided in the source?
- Does the source provide any new information, or a different perspective?
- How is the source relevant to your research question?
- What audience does the author appear to be addressing?
- When was the source published?
- In what format (e.g. blog, scholarly journal article, video, newspaper article) was the source published? What does this format tell you about the purpose of the information?