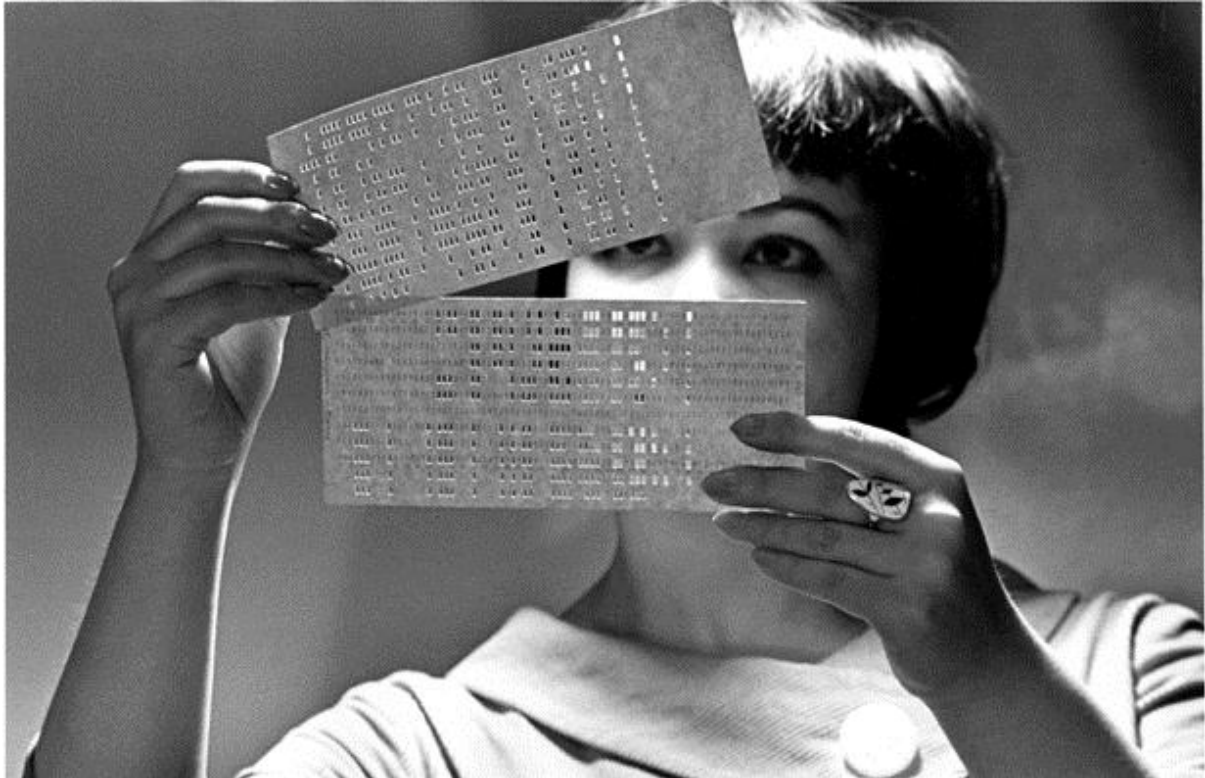


# Why do I need to check sources?

---



Yakov Khalip-Mayan Language Unraveled. Punch Cards. 1962

To produce quality academic works (and get good results) you need to support your arguments and statements with evidence from other sources. Whether these sources are from traditional sources such as books, journals and newspapers or the web, they should be relevant, accurate, up-to-date and objective.

Learning how to critically evaluate information sources is a key skill for undertaking your assignments.

Before you use a source in your assignment ask yourself whether it meets the assessment task set by your lecturer. For example:

- Were particular sources specified? e.g. peer-reviewed journals only
- Was a timeframe required? e.g. only information published in the last 5 years
- Were you asked to undertake a broad search? If so you need to check that you have a wide range of reputable sources

## How to evaluate sources

You need to consider a number of issues relating to the quality of the information you plan to use in academic work. One good way to do this is to use a simple Who / Why/ Where / When checklist to help you separate the good quality sources from those that may lose you marks.



### Who?

- Who is the author?
- Is the author a qualified expert with academic credentials and other publication in the subject?
- Can you identify the institution or organisation, if any, to which the author belongs?
- Who published it? What type of information does this organisation usually publish? Is it a university press or well -known publisher?
- Who is the intended audience? Is it meant for the general public, specialists, students? Is the language used easy to understand or very technical?

## Why?

- Why was it written?
- Is it fact based, opinion based?
- Is it intended to educate, inform, entertain, sell something?
- What ideas is the author trying to promote?
- Does the item present a balanced argument or does there seem to be a bias?
- Is the piece written to promote the ideas of a particular group?
- Question the motives someone may have for creating information

## Where?

Where did the information come from? Is it a popular press publication, a trade publication, a scholarly or academic publication, or something else?

- Did you find the item using the Library catalogue or databases?
- Is the book or journal peer-reviewed?
- Is there a bibliography listing the sources that were used to create the information?
- Is it from the web?

Be aware of where you found the information as this will help you to determine its usefulness. If the information came from one of the resources the Library provides such as journals, books and online databases it has already been through a process of quality assurance. This helps to ensure that the information is of a good standard; however you still need to evaluate it before including it in your project or assignment.

It is more difficult to evaluate the quality of information that you have retrieved on the internet. You can find some really useful websites out there but remember that anyone can publish on the web, so you need to be careful – always consider whether what you find is accurate, up-to-date, unbiased and appropriate for your assignment.

## When?

- When was it written?
- Has it been updated?
- Do newer editions or revisions exist?
- Has the material changed from a previous publication?

Is the time frame appropriate for your assignment? In some subject areas you need to use current, up-to-date information, in other areas older sources may be just as useful.

## Types of information sources

When conducting your research, the information you'll find will be from a **Primary Source** or a **Secondary source**

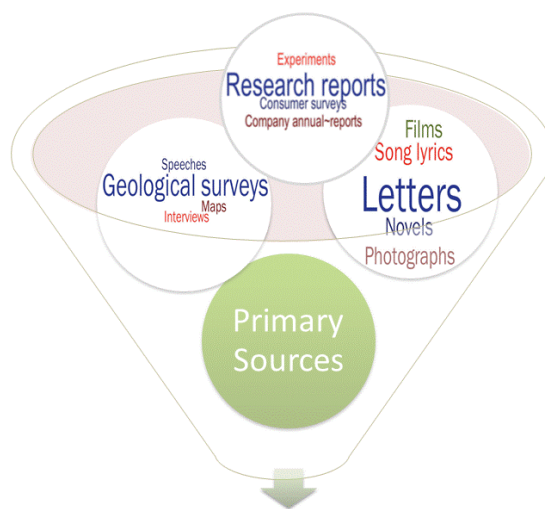
- **Primary sources** are original first-hand information written by the author based on his/her own research

Examples: original data, artworks, works of literature, theses or journal articles containing original research, technical reports, patents.

- **Secondary sources** are information summarised by another person that interprets, analyses, describes or evaluates a primary source.

Examples: textbooks, reviews of artwork / literature / research findings, summaries of best practice, etc.

Both these types of sources are published in a range of formats: books, journal articles, reports, theses, conference papers, digital repositories, blogs, wikis, social media sites etc.



As a rule of thumb, any source that interprets, reviews, analyses or discusses any kind of data or information, can be considered a **secondary source**.

Contact DkIT Library for advice on any aspect of evaluating information.

E-mail: [library@dkit.ie](mailto:library@dkit.ie)  
Phone: +353 42 937 0310