

Senior Thesis: Summer Packet of Fun!!



Overview of Tasks:

1. Complete preliminary research – see guidelines on evaluating sources provided on pages 3-8 (**take advantage of the TO Library online databases!!**)
2. Choose a preliminary topic, research question, and issue
3. Complete more in-depth research on BOTH SIDES of your chosen issue. Go to the library! Use the online databases! Read widely!!
4. When you return to campus this fall, you will be turning in one of the following:
 - ONE **annotated** full-length book that addresses your issue, OR
 - EIGHT **annotated** articles that address both the affirmative and negative sides of your issue (no less than three articles for one side)

****Your first assignment once you return will be to submit a proposal for your thesis paper (template on page 9 for your reference) – this will be an easy task if you have thoroughly researched your issue!****

Annotating Your Texts

- Purchase a PRINT book (used is fine) or PRINT OUT articles. We recommend that you cut and paste the URLs for any articles you come across in your research and save them in a separate document so you can easily find them when you create your bibliography.
- Be sure that each text meets the source guidelines provided in this packet.
- Highlight, underline, and/or star important passages in the text.
- Write an explanatory note next to EACH PASSAGE that you have marked. What is important about it? Why is it useful? Mark text that:
 - Defines terms that are important to your issue
 - Provides history or other important background information on your issue
 - Supports either the affirmative or negative side of your issue
 - Explores ideas/concepts/arguments that you might want to research further
 - Refers to other works that might be helpful in your research

Evaluating Sources: Brief Guidelines for Students

(Adapted from a guide by Doug Hesse Executive Director of Writing at The University of Denver)

Not all sources are created equal. Some present information that has been carefully gathered and checked. Others report information, even rumor, that is second- or third hand or, worse, perhaps not even based on fact. Perhaps worst of all, some unethical people claim that truthful information is “fake news” or they simply lie.

Some sources make claims that are accompanied by strong evidence and reasoning. Others make claims based only on opinion, or they use information illogically. Some are written by experts wanting to advance knowledge. Others are produced by people wanting to promote special interests even if it means ignoring data, oversimplifying issues, or overpromising results. Some sources have been reviewed by experts and published only after passing standards. Others appear without anyone judging their quality.

You don't want to use weak sources that hurt your ETHOS, mislead your readers, and ruin your paper. Therefore, evaluate each source you find by asking five questions.

Five questions for evaluating sources:

1. How did you find the source? (See A.)
2. Is the publisher authoritative? (See B.)
3. Is the author qualified to write about the topic? (See C.)
4. Does the source have sufficient and credible evidence? (See D.)
5. Does the source pass other critical thinking tests? (See E.)

A. How did you find the source?

Sources that you find through DATABASES, especially databases you access through a library web site are more likely to be useful than sources found through a general Internet search. A source in a database has been edited and

checked for quality. The more scholarly a database is, the more confident you can be that its sources are reliable.

B. Is the publisher authoritative?

The publisher is the company or group ultimately responsible for a book, periodical, or Web site.

Reliable sources are . . .

- **From reputable publishers.** Generally, encyclopedias, textbooks, and academic journals, such as the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, are authoritative, as are books from university and other established presses (such as Pearson); sources published in major newspapers, such as *The Washington Post* or *Wall Street Journal*; and in established general readership magazines such as *Time* or *Harper's*.
- **Web sites from educational, not-for-profit, or government organizations.** Web sites from professional associations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English or the American Medical Association, are reliable.
- **Direct online versions of authoritative print sources.** Many journals, newspapers, and book publishers release online versions of print publications. Online versions of authoritative publications are reliable.
- **Serious publications designed to inform or argue responsibly.** They are based on facts and careful analysis, even if they advocate a certain position.

Questionable sources are . . .

- **From special-interest groups.** Some groups exist only to advance a narrow interest or political viewpoint. Examples would be a group existing only to legalize marijuana or one to stop all immigration. Special-interest groups might publish useful sources, but you want to check their facts and reasoning by asking “Why does the group exist?” Apply other tests listed in this chapter.



- **Web sites from commercial enterprises** may or may not provide evidence or list sources for claims they make. If they fail to do so, or if the evidence and sources seem weak, don't use them.
- **Secondhand excerpts, quotations, and references.** Quoted or summarized material may have been edited in a biased or inaccurate manner. Always check the original.
- **Satirical publications designed mainly to entertain or publications that are intentionally misleading.** People sometimes fail to recognize some- thing as satire (totally exaggerated for a humorous effect) and instead take it for fact, as with *The Onion*.

C. Is the author qualified to write about the topic?

Anyone can express an opinion or argue for an action, but the only writers worth quoting or summarizing in your writing have knowledge and expertise about their topics. Often, their credentials appear in a note in an introduction, at the bottom of the first page, or at the end of an article. In a book, look for an "About the Author" statement, on a Web site a short biography or a "Contributors" note. Sometimes you might need to do some research to learn about the author.

Reliable sources are . . .

- **From expert authors.** Experts have degrees or credentials in their field. Biographical material in the source may list these credentials. If in doubt, look up the author in a biographical dictionary, search online for a résumé or bio, or search a database. Check if the author's name appears in other reliable sources. Check whether there is contact information for questions or comments.

Questionable sources are . . .

- **From authors with fuzzy credentials.** A warning sign should flash when you can't identify who has produced a source. Discussion threads, anonymous blogs, and similar online postings are questionable when they don't give information about the writer's qualifications. Check to make sure that listed credentials fit the topic. Just because someone has

a graduate degree in history, for example, doesn't qualify the person to give medical advice.

D. Does the source have sufficient and accurate evidence?

If an author expresses a point of view but offers little evidence to back up that position, reject the source.

Reliable sources are . . .

- **Well supported with evidence.** The source's writer provides clear and plentiful facts and reasons to support assertions.
- **Factually accurate.** The sources for statistics, quotations, and other information are listed. You or anyone can look them up to check their accuracy.
- **Current.** Information is recent or, in the case of Web sites, regularly updated.

Questionable sources are . . .

- **Unsupported or biased.** They carry assertions that have little or no supporting evidence.
- **Factually questionable.** They may include statistics or other information, but they fail to identify who generated it. You have no way to check facts.
- **Outdated.** You don't want to cite 20-year-old medical advice, for example.

Sometimes a source seems to use evidence and logic, but it does so inaccurately or badly. For example, Source A advances a wild (and totally groundless) conspiracy theory that the Denver International Airport actually camouflages a huge military base. It claims that in 2011 a comet missed Earth by 22 miles. Actually, that comet missed Earth by *22 million* miles, as explained by Source B, NASA expert Don Yeomans. Always be sure to check facts.

A. BAD SOURCE

President Obama was in Denver Sept 27th last year when Comet Elenin passed by the earth, “barely missing” us by 22 miles. Some say that if the comet would have struck earth, it’s back to the stone-age for us. Nonetheless, their [sic] was a chance that it could have hit and President Obama was conveniently ushered to Denver . . . which, in my opinion, adds more to the existence of not only a military bunker, but also the largest, most advanced bunker in the US. . . .

— thehive.com/2012/03/08/something-is-rotten-in-the-denver-airport-25-photos/

B. CREDIBLE SOURCE

The scientific reality is this modest-sized icy dirtball’s influence upon our planet is so incredibly minuscule that my subcompact automobile exerts a greater gravitational influence on Earth than the comet ever would. That includes the date it came closest to Earth (Oct. 16), when the comet’s remnants got no closer than about 22 million miles (35.4 million kilometers).

— www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/asteroids/news/elenin20111025.html

E. Does the source pass other critical thinking tests?

Use CRITICAL THINKING skills when you evaluate a source!!

Reliable sources are . . .

- **Balanced in tone.** The source is respectful of others and creates a sense of fairness.
- **Balanced in treatment.** The author advocates a credible position but also acknowledges different viewpoints. For example, they summarize contradictory evidence.
- **Logical.** The source draws fair conclusions from evidence. The reasoning is clear.
- **Well edited.** The source has been proofread and is free of grammatical errors.

Questionable sources are . . .

- **Biased in tone.** Some warning signs of biased tone are name-calling, sarcasm, stereotyping, or absolute assertions about matters that are open to interpretation. For example, if a source declares, “Television programs are never worth watching” or that “Women are always better than men at writing,” you are encountering bias.
- **One-sided.** The author omits any mention or fair summary of competing views or gives unreliable information, especially if openly ridiculing competing positions.
- **Full of logical fallacies.**
- **Marked by errors.** Beware if the source has typos or sloppy errors.



Senior Thesis Proposal 2024

Name:

Topic:

Research question:

Why is this an important question for image-bearers to wrestle with?

Preliminary thesis statement: (Answer your research question with a one-sentence thesis statement based on the reading you have done so far)

Presuppositions implicit in thesis statement: (List any assumptions that are implied by your thesis statement)

Background information you will provide to your audience to prepare them for your argument: (What terms will you need to define? What history will you need to provide? What other background information might be helpful?)

Main arguments you will use to support your thesis:

Main counter arguments you will address:

Research status: (Which information/arguments have you found support for? Which do you need to research further?)

(Provide a spot at the bottom of your proposal for the following signatures)

Sr. Thesis Coordinator: _____ Date: _____

Assigned Mentor: _____ Date: _____