

Research Paper and Report Writing

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

PREWRITING: PLANNING AND RESEARCHING

Evaluating Sources

Directions Research sources can all be categorized as either primary or secondary sources. Primary sources include firsthand information. Diaries, letters, photographs, and interviews with people are all considered primary sources. Secondary sources contain information that has been gathered and analyzed by an outside authority. Encyclopedias and most magazine articles and books are examples of secondary sources. You should try to use a balance of primary and secondary sources in your research. Answer the questions below to get an overview of the kinds of sources you've identified so far.

1. What primary sources are you planning on using?

2. What secondary sources are you planning on using?

3. What other types of primary or secondary sources would help round out your research?

Directions Choose one of the sources you've identified so far and answer the questions below to find out whether your source is accurate and reliable. Then refer to the questions as you evaluate the rest of your sources.

1. A good source is written by an author who knows a lot about the subject. Is the author of this source an expert on the subject? What makes you think so?

2. All authors have a primary purpose for writing. They may want to inform, to entertain, to sell a product or service, or to persuade readers to act or think a certain way. What is the author's purpose in writing this source? What makes you think so?

3. Can any facts and figures provided be checked for accuracy?

4. When was this source published? Could the information be out of date? (Remember, new discoveries are always being made, especially in science and technology.)

5. Overall, on a scale of one to ten, how accurate would you say your source is? Why?

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Evaluating Online Sources

Directions Choose one online source that relates to your research topic and answer the questions below in order to determine the source's usefulness and accuracy. As you continue your research, you can use the same questions to evaluate other online sources as well.

1. How useful is the site?

How much information does the site offer?

How is the site organized? What parts of the site is your eye drawn to first?

Does the site contain functioning links to other sites? If so, to what kinds of sites does it link? Which of these links might help you with your research?

2. How accurate is the site?

Who or what is responsible for this site? Is it a business? An individual? A publication? A university? Or is the source of the site unclear?

All Web sites have a purpose. Some sites want to inform, some to convince people that one point of view is better than another, some to sell a product or service. What, do you think, is the purpose of this site? What makes you think so?

When was the site created or last updated? Is the information up-to-date or out-of-date?

What do you think is the overall accuracy of this site? Would you use this site in your research paper? Why or why not?
