**Select the Best Information Source**

See the below table to determine which sources are best for finding the type of information you need for your research project.

To learn more about *when* these types of sources are published on an event or topic, see the [**Information Cycle**](http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/informationcycle.html).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Best For** | **Intended Audience** | **Watch For/Consider** |
| [**Newspapers**](http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/find/articleguide.html#newspapers) | * Daily local, national, and international news, events, and editorial coverage
* Statistics and photojournalism
* Record of events and quotes from experts, officials, and witnesses
 | * General audience
 | * Authors usually not experts
* If a story is breaking, corrections to initial report likely
* Editorial bias of a publication
 |
| [**Popular Magazines**](http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/find/articleguide.html) | * Current information
* Short, easy to understand articles (including analysis, interviews, opinions, etc.)
* Photographs and illustrations
 | * General audience, or those with a specific, recreational interest (e.g. sports, fashion, science, etc.)
 | * Authors usually not experts
* Sources not always cited
* Editorial bias of a publication
 |
| [**Professional/Trade Magazines**](http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/find/articleguide.html) | * Current information
* Specialized articles related to a particular discipline or profession (including context and analysis)
 | * Professional organizations or professionals/scholars with similar interests
 | * Articles vary between short and easy to lengthy and highly specific
* Sources not always cited
* Has characteristics in common with both popular magazines and scholarly journals
 |
| [**Scholarly/Academic Journals**](http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/find/articleguide.html) | * Recent research on a topic
* Focused, peer-reviewed articles written by experts
* Data, statistics, charts, and graphs
* Bibliographies of other sources
 | * Scholars, researchers, professionals, and university students in particular field
 | * Terminology and/or data may be difficult for novices to understand
 |
| [**Books**](http://vufind.carli.illinois.edu/vf-uiu/) | * Comprehensive overview of topic
* Background and historical context
* Bibliographies of other sources
 | * Varies (general audience through scholars)
 | * Dated information
* Bias (dependent on author, publisher, etc.)
 |
| [**Websites**](http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/webeval.html) | * News
* Government information
* Company information
* Alternate points of view
 | * General audience
 | * Credibility and accuracy cannot always be assured
* Bias (dependent on author, publisher, etc.)
* Sources not always cited
 |

**Databases**

**What is a database?**

* Library databases allow you to efficiently search for published information such as magazine, journal, and newspaper articles. Library databases can be general (all disciplines) or discipline-specific (e.g. a psychology database).

**Why use a database?**

* **Reliable -**Many articles found in library databases have undergone a peer review process and are generally more reliable than information found on the Internet. Additionally, databases provide all the information you need to evaluate a source for credibility (such as author name, publication details, and a summary).
* **Relevant -** Library databases allow you to customize your search to get the most relevant results. You can search using keywords, discipline-specific terminology, subject headings, and descriptors. You can also search by author, title, and limit your results using various criteria (date, source type, etc.).
* **Accessible -**Databases often provide access to the full-text of an article so you do not need to go to the library to retrieve it in person. Additionally, databases access is purchased by libraries for its patrons which allows you to access otherwise pricey information at no charge.