Tackling the Complexities of Source Evaluation: Active Learning Exercises That Foster Students' Critical Thinking

Source: www.making-healthy-choices.com

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Auburn University Libraries
AABIG Conference
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What is it we want students to be able to do?

Librarians and faculty agree that source evaluation is an important part of research….

But—ask faculty about student learning outcomes and you get a variety of responses.

What We Hear from Faculty at AU

"I want students to be able to distinguish between popular and scholarly sources."

"I want students to be able to distinguish good websites from bad."

"I want students to be able to identify "credible", "reputable" sources, whether on the Web or in print."

Source Evaluation and IL Competency Standards

Standard Three: The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

Performance Indicator: The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources.

Outcome: Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias

Many of us organize evaluation criteria into checklists…

Auburn University Libraries

Web Source Evaluation Criteria

ACCURACY
If sources are cited, are they reliable?
How does the information compare with that in other sources on the topic?
Can the information be verified by other sources?
Is the information free of factual errors?
Are there spelling, typographical or grammatical errors?

AUDIENCE
Who are the intended readers? Who are the authors/creators trying to reach?
Are the language, vocabulary, style and tone appropriate for the intended audience?
What are the audience demographics? (age, educational level, etc.)
Are the authors/creators targeting a particular group or segment of society?

AUTHORITY
Who wrote the information?
What are the authors'/ creators' credentials for this particular topic?
Are the authors/creators affiliated with a particular organization or institution? What does that affiliation suggest about the authors/creators?
Is the publisher/sponsor of the source reputable?
Are the authors'/creators' information provided so that you may submit questions or feedback?

CURRENCY
Is the content current? Does the date of the information directly affect the accuracy or usefulness of the information?
When was the content first uploaded, last modified or updated? Are there 'dead' links within the source?

OBJECTIVITY/BIAS
What is the authors'/creators' point of view?
Is the point of view subtle or explicit?
Is the information presented as fact or opinion?
If opinion, is the opinion supported by credible data or informed argument?
Is the information one-sided? Are alternate views represented?
Does the point of view effect how you view the information?

PURPOSE
What is the authors'/creators' purpose or objective? To explain, provide new information or news, entertain, persuade or sell?
Does the source achieve effectively its purpose?

Look familiar?

How about this?

RESEARCH GUIDE: TYPES OF PERIODICALS

The thousands of periodicals in the Ralph Brown Draughon Library form a continuum ranging from "popular" magazines through "trade/technical" publications to "scholarly/professional/refereed" journals. It is important to know the difference. The following chart lists the typical characteristics of these three kinds of periodicals. Evaluating a periodical by these criteria should allow for the choice of appropriate sources for various types of assignments. Keep in mind, however, that some periodicals defy easy categories.

	POPULAR	TRADE/PROFESSIONAL	SCHOLARLY (refereed or peer-reviewed)
Publisher	commercial firm	commercial firm or association	university or association (large scientific/academic publishers)
Frequency	weekly,biweekly, or monthly	weekly, biweekly, or monthly	quarterly
Audience	general readers	special readers (persons employed in that field)	special readers (academics & researchers)
Appearance	colorful, illustrated	colorful, illustrated	plain, mostly text
Article Type	short, nontechnical w/photos & graphics	short, technical w. photos & graphics	long, research style w. tables & charts
Writing Style	informal, journalistic	informal, journalistic	formal and/or scientific
Authors	staff writers	staff writers & persons employed in that field	academics and researchers
News Content	covers broad issues and popular and/or business affairs	covers narrow trade or professional issues	NO news coverage
Advertising	ads for business or consumer products	ads for specialized trade/professional products & services	ads for books, if any
Research Apparatus	none	none	extensive bibliographies & advanced statistics
Examples	*Business Week, Sports*	*Advertising Age, Columbia Journalism Review,*	*Academy of Management,*

Pedagogy, Critical Thinking, & IL

- Just because students are familiar with evaluative criteria doesn't mean they will apply them
- The Knowing vs. Doing Divide

What we observe AU students doing– or not…

Source: http://www.polleverywhere.com/blog/

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME
quickmeme.com

Are we missing the forest for the trees?

- Is a checklist approach to source evaluation too mechanistic? Too piecemeal?
- Do class exercises built around checklists of criteria address the information ecosystem in which source evaluation comes into play?
- Do these exercises encourage students to consider the context in which information is generated and used?

Source Evaluation Outside Standard Three

Standard One: source evaluation is tied to information need

- Knows how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated
- Identifies the value and differences of potential resources in a variety of formats
- Identifies the purpose and audience of potential resources (e.g., popular vs scholarly, current vs. historical
- Differentiates between primary and secondary sources, recognizing how their use and importance vary with each discipline

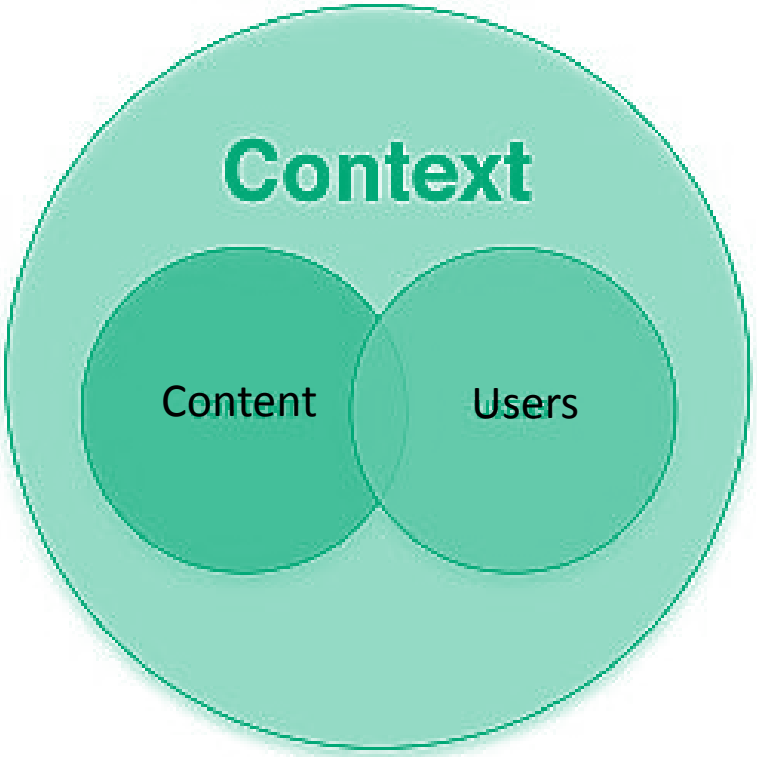
Source Evaluation Outside Standard Three
(Continued)

Standard Four: source evaluation is tied to using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

- Applies new and prior information to the planning and creation of a particular product or performance
- Integrates the new and prior information … in a manner that supports the purposes of the product or performance
- Communicates the product or performance effectively to others

Draft Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

- "[Authority] is contextual in that the information need may determine the level of authority required
- "[Authority] is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority."
- "The essential characteristic of format is the underlying process of information creation, production, and dissemination….[T]he quality and usefulness of a piece of information is determined by the processes that went into making it.



Source: http://youcanbuild.it/is-content-really-king

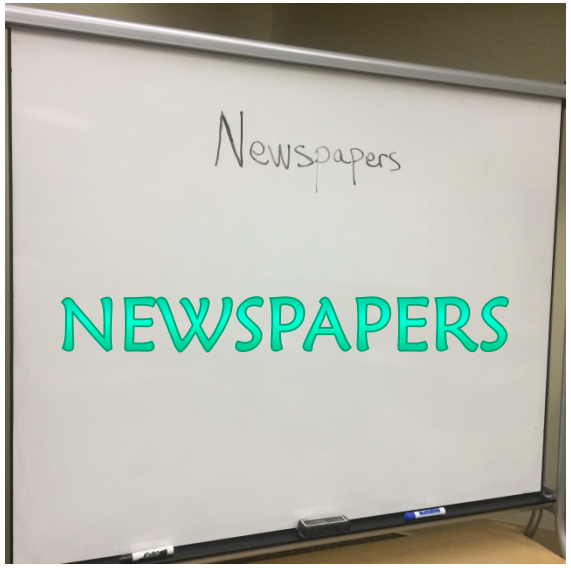
Active Learning Exercise #1

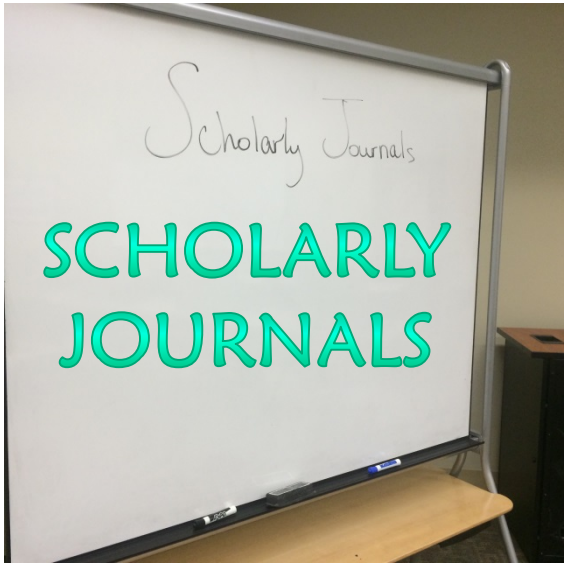
Class activity

Students will:

- Identify information sources in various formats (e.g., newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals) and evaluate the differences in their attributes
- Explore how the length of the review process impacts thoroughness and accuracy
- Recognize types of sources that are appropriate for their assignment

Instructor prep: Set-up stations





Instructor prep

Title: Baby You Can Drive My Car. By: di Giovanni, Janine, Newsweek Global, 11/8/2013, Vol. 161, Issue 40

Database: Academic Search Premier

Baby You Can Drive My Car

Contents

An exclusive conversation with the woman driving the Women's Spring

Listen American Accent

Newsmakers

An exclusive conversation with the woman driving the Women's S

Benjamin Franklin once wrote that there are three types of people in those that move." Manal al-Sharif, a 34-year-old computer scientis

Arabian cultural taboo of allowing the women to get behind a wheel

American Foreign Policy Interests, 34:149–166, 2012
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THE DAILY STAR LEBANON

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woman held

STORY SUMMARY

The heads of the EU's major institutions urged Sudanese authorities on Tuesday to free a Christian woman sentenced to hang for apostasy, joining a wave of international

AFP

From the Archives

Arab Women and the Future of the Middle East

NCAFP

EDITOR'S NOTE The central theme of the 2005 closed-door and off-the-record roundtable conference on "Arab Women and the Future of the Middle East" was how to improve U.S. security in the face of threats from

Question for Students

Define or describe what makes an Internet source reputable

You may respond at **PollEv.com/tonicarter312** when the presenter pushes this poll

Text **315975** and your message to **37607**

"proof of publisher"
15 days ago

"scholarly"
15 days ago

"it must be from a none .com url"
15 days ago

"The experience of the author in the field being written about"
15 days ago

"not wikipedia"
15 days ago

Worksheet

Answer the following questions about your source. Feel free to use the Internet for help

1. What type of source do you have? For example, a magazine article. If you're not sure, investigate online.

   Who's the publisher or creator? (example: Time Magazine)

   Do either of these factors influence whether you would use the source for your assignment?

   Explain why or why not.

2. How often does the publisher or creator of your source publish or post new content? If you're not sure, investigate online.

   Explain why this may be important in determining whether the source is appropriate for your assignment.

Worksheet

3. Is your source analyzing arguments surrounding your topic? Is your source reporting on new research on your topic? Does your source have a purpose other than these?

    Does the purpose of the source influence whether you would use it for your assignment?

    Explain why or why not.

4. Explain the author's authority (or lack of) on this topic.

    Is the author sharing his or her opinion?

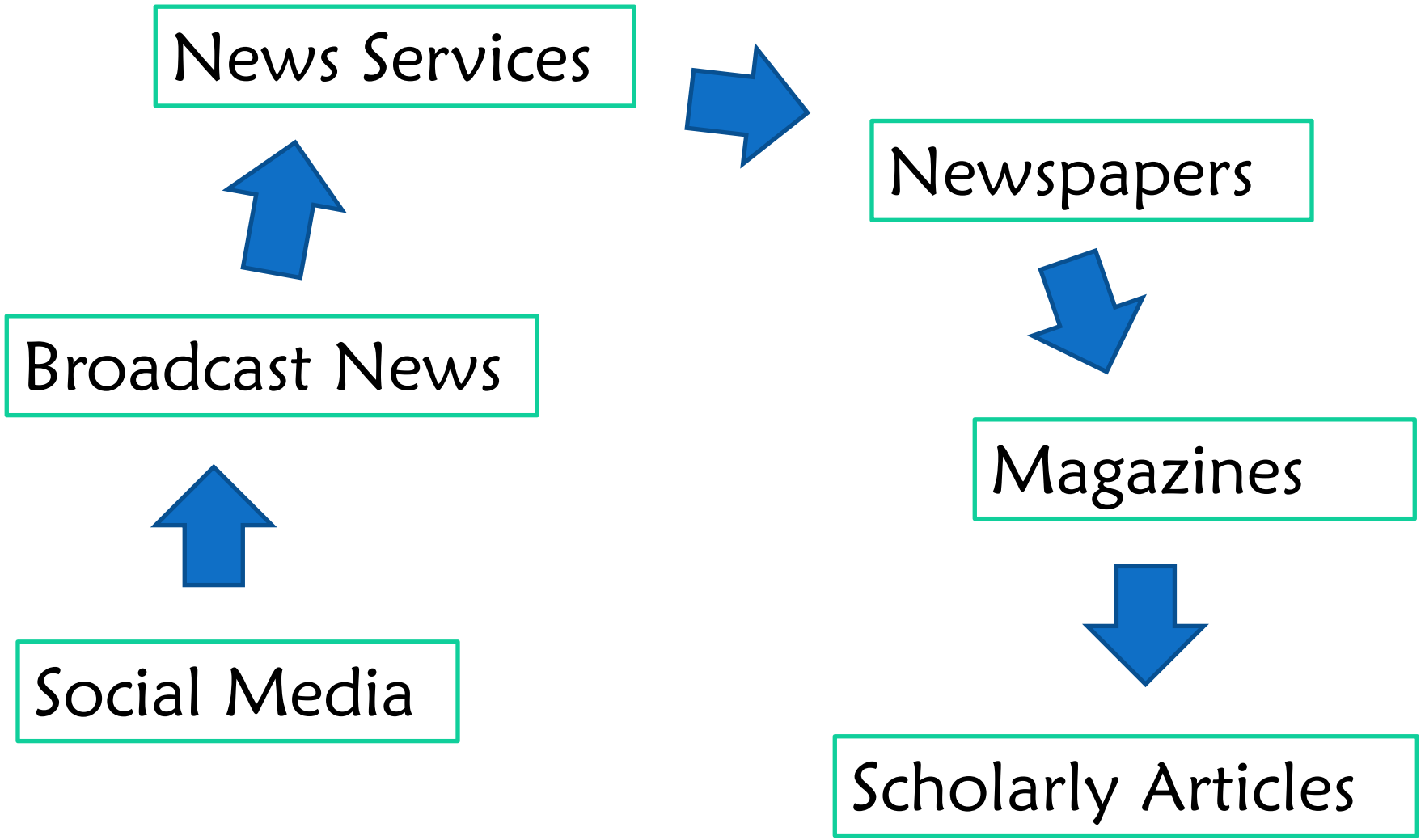
    Do either of these factors influence whether you would use the source for your assignment?

    Explain why or why not.

5. Who is the audience for this source?

    Explain one way that you can determine this.

Activity


News Services
Newspapers
Magazines
Scholarly Articles
Social Media
Broadcast News

"The expert learns that the instant publishing found in social media often comes at the cost of accuracy, while the thorough editorial process of a book often comes at the cost of currency. Whatever form information takes, the expert looks to the underlying processes of creation as well as the final product in order to critically evaluate that information for use as evidence."

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education

Active Learning Exercise #2

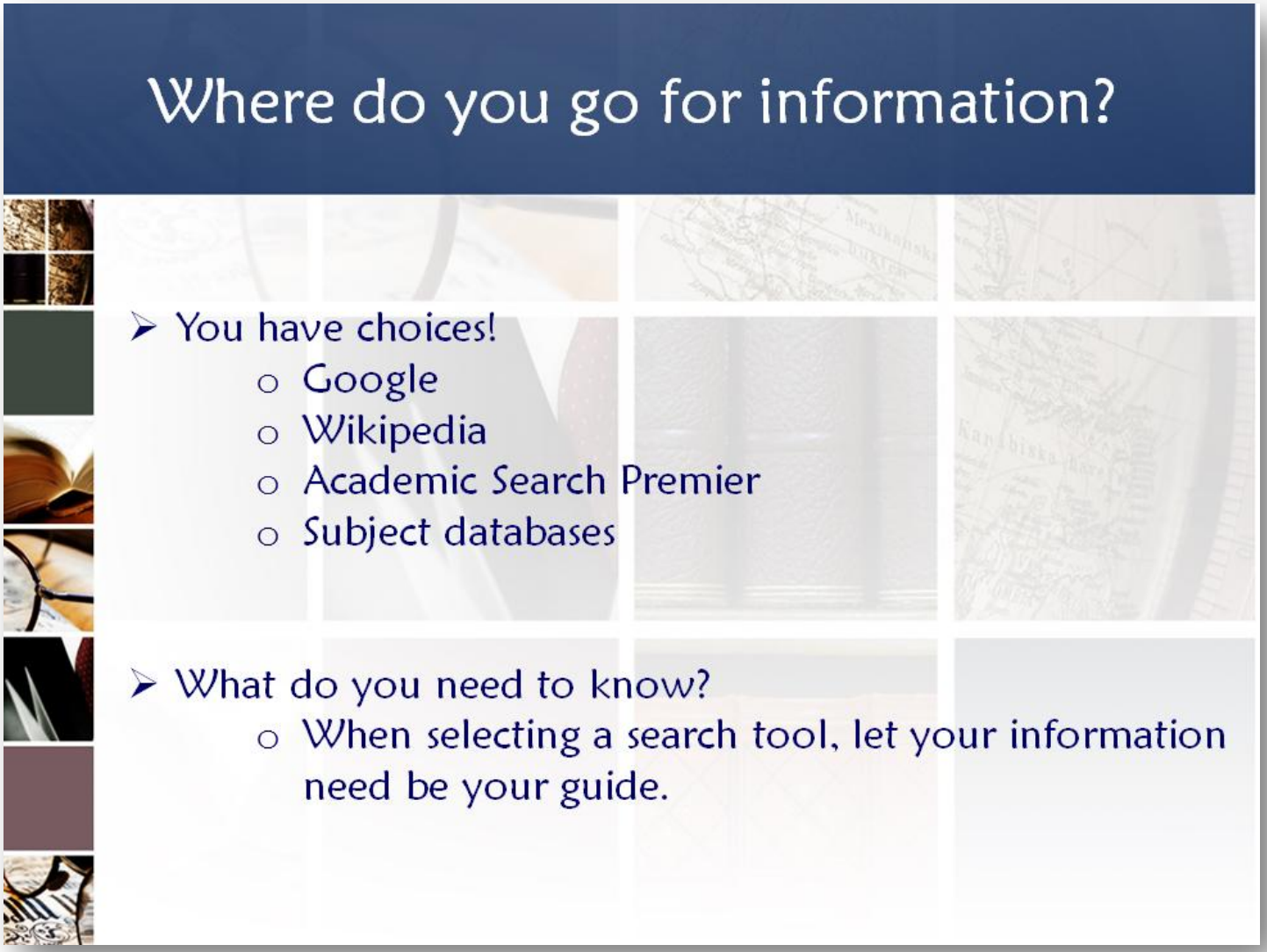
Class Activity

Students will:

- Consider the appropriateness of different types of resources in relation to their information need

- Consider how and why they (and others) might use these information resources

Sample class slide: Setting the stage



Sample class slide: Instructions to class

Group exercise

- Each group will conduct a search with a different research tool. All groups will search for sources about: **prayer in public schools**
- Each group will prepare a presentation to the class on the types of resources retrieved by your search tool
- Consider these questions:
  - **Who** might use the resources you retrieved?
  - For what purpose? **How** and **why** might someone use these types of resources?
  - Would the types of sources retrieved by this search tool be useful to you for your essay assignment?

Worksheet

Who might use the resources retrieved by your search tool?

- ❑ You, me, anybody (general audience)
- ❑ Persons employed in a specific trade, career, or profession
- ❑ Scholars/academics (college faculty, scientists, researchers)

Worksheet
(continued)

How and **why** might someone use the sources retrieved? Tell us about any special features of these sources. For example, do they offer:

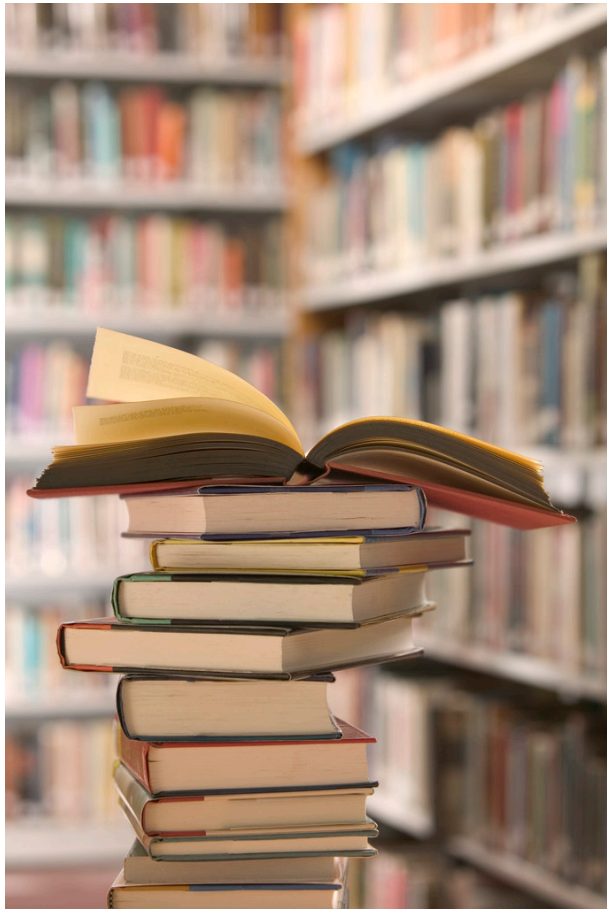
- ❑ Differing opinions or perspectives
- ❑ Up-to-date news or eyewitness accounts
- ❑ Data, statistics
- ❑ General overviews of a topic
- ❑ Career-specific news and information
- ❑ Focused, in-depth research
- ❑ Bibliographies that point to other relevant sources of information
- ❑ Other useful features. Please list.

Worksheet
(continued)

Would the kinds of sources retrieved by this tool be useful to you for your essay assignment? Please give reasons for your answer.

Reinforcing Learning Outcomes

Active Learning Exercise #2 pairs well with an annotated bibliography assignment in which students address the value and appropriateness of each source they use in their research papers.



Questions?

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