



## Locate Reliable Sources and Encourage Good Digital Citizenship

### Teach Students To Find The Right Sources

Students are adept at finding information, but teachers frequently complain that they find the wrong information or are looking in the wrong places. Discussing your expectations not only for students' researched product but also their research process can help avoid their choosing inapt sources.

Sometimes instructors aim for this goal by listing source requirements, like, "You must include at least four sources, two of which come from peer-reviewed journals." Or "You may not use Wikipedia." Adding an explanation of "why" allows the research skills you're teaching to become transferable. If students are simply instructed to use a certain number or type of sources, they often assume that this is a teacher's individual quirk, not a thoughtful understanding of how research works.

### Explain Why You've Established Specific Guidelines

Try to explain why you are establishing these guidelines:

- Why are peer-reviewed studies particularly important to your field?
- Why are they more reputable than other kinds of sources?
- What are their problems as well, and why do researchers in your field feel that the benefits outweigh the problems?
- Why do you feel that Wikipedia is not a sufficiently reputable source?
- If you discourage students from using online sources, why?
- Can you teach them to use internet sources more discriminatingly so that they can harness the power of this tremendous resource without misusing it?

Any time spent on these skills is actually time spent building students' subject-specific skills for the future. Demonstrating how researchers in your field do their work is a skill you are uniquely positioned to share. Any assumption that students should have learned these skills in a general composition or English course overlooks the reality that an instructor outside of your specialty is likely not qualified to offer the insights that you are.

### Teach Your Students To Be Good Digital Citizens

Beyond guiding students towards or away from particular types of sources, researched writing is an excellent place to include information about digital citizenship, a term that



is often understood as “protecting your privacy online” or “not posting inappropriate things online” but actually has a far broader meaning. Being a good digital citizen means understanding where sources originate and how to determine information’s reliability. This is one reason I discourage a flat rejection of Wikipedia, which can be useful if students know how to read its bibliography and gauge its accuracy. [Alan November](#) has done excellent work teaching digital citizenship and has many online resources.

Students may not know about library network databases; my students are generally shocked to learn that they have free access to JSTOR or ProQuest and what those databases can do. If your institution does not subscribe, you can at least show students Google Scholar and its capabilities.

## Equip Students To Research More Efficiently

A quick search game can make this learning fun and relevant.

1. Choose a topic relevant to your current work or assignment, and give students five minutes to find a reputable, trustworthy source.
2. After seeing what they’ve found, demonstrate a range of ways to refine their search by:
  - Using stronger search terms or boolean operators
  - Testing tools other than Google
  - Narrowing their searches to academic sites
  - Locating the original source instead of a re-reported site

Whys rather than rules will lead to transferrable skills and a greater sense of investment for students, who realize that they are learning how professionals in your field work rather than believing themselves to be held, arbitrarily, to a set of whims.