FINDING AND EVALUATING SOURCES

WHY YOUR SOURCES MATTER:

A credible source will lend credibility to you as the author. Likewise, a relevant and trustworthy source will aid your writing.

Rather than labelling a source as "good" or "bad" it is important to evaluate the relevance to your research and the trustworthiness of the source.

TYPES OF SOURCES

Primary
-First-hand accounts

Examples: diaries/journals, speeches, photographs, articles reporting original research, and most newspaper articles.

Secondary
-Interpret, critique, or analyze primary sources.

Examples: textbooks, scholarly essays, reviews, some newspaper articles, and encyclopedias.

THINKING ABOUT SOURCES

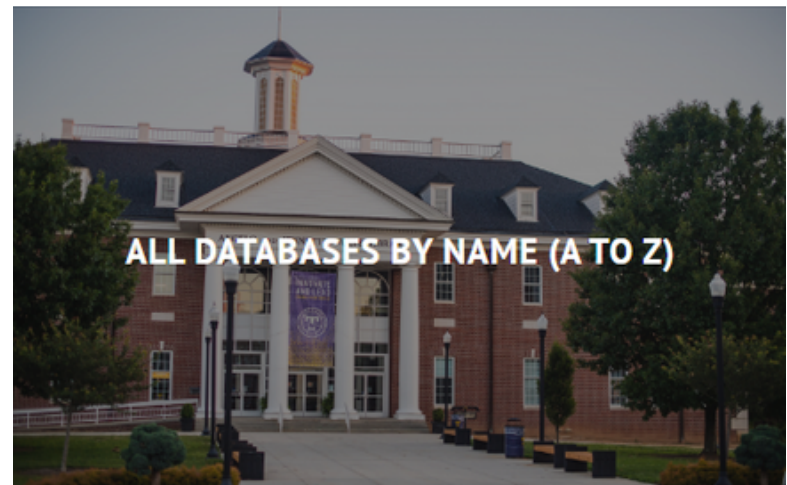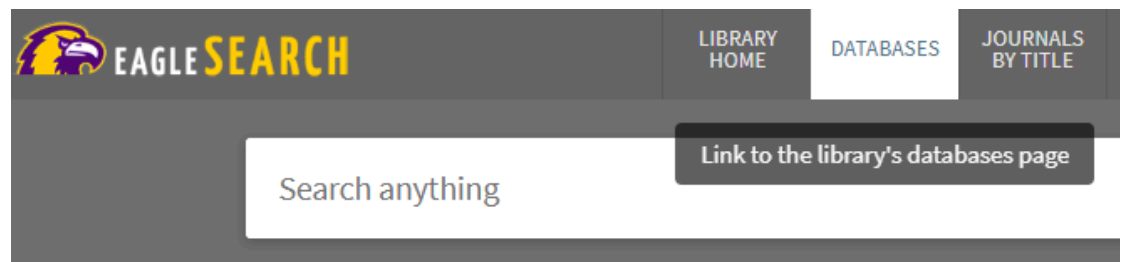First, ask yourself:
"What do I need and how do I plan to use it?"

WHERE TO FIND SOURCES

-Angelo & Jennette Volpe Library (either printed material or online databases).
-Public Library
-Google Scholar
-Government Websites
-Newspapers, books, magazines
-Organizational websites
-Depending on your need: social media, personal anecdotes/interviews, surveys
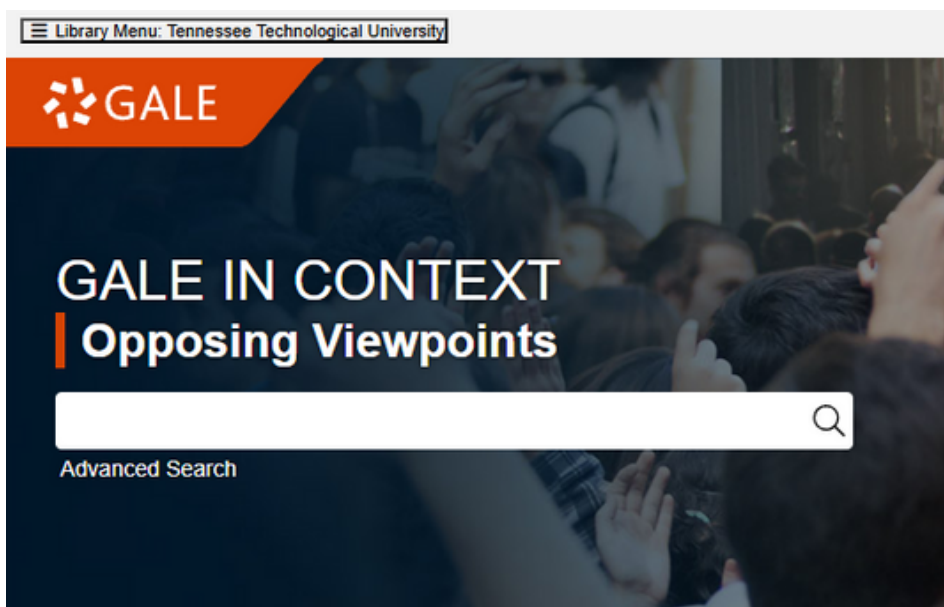
A few examples from the Volpe Library

You can find different databases by either clicking on the Library via TechExpress → clicking on Databases → All Databases by Name (A-Z)

Or on the Library Homepage → Database Access → All Databases by Name (A-Z)

The OED or Oxford English Dictionary

This database will give information about words, from meaning, usage statistics, to etymology and history.

Opposing Viewpoints

This database is focused on finding alternative viewpoints and will be helpful if you need to have an opposing view.

JSTOR

This database will give access to primary sources.

Methods for Evaluation

Currency - how recent it is
Relevance - how it meets your needs
Authority - where it comes from
Accuracy - is it factual
Purpose - the reason it exists

Visit https://researchguides.ben.edu/source-evaluation for more in-depth information

Background: use source to explain
Exhibit: use source as evidence or example to analyze
Argument: information you agree, disagree, or are adding to
Method: using source's way of analyzing to apply to your own argument

Visit https://libguides.mjc.edu/researchassignments/beam for more in-depth information

Stop – ask yourself questions about the content and publisher
Investigate the source – answer those questions
Find better coverage – If it's hard to determine the credibility, search elsewhere and/or fact-check.
Fact-checking websites:
FactCheck.org - Snopes.com - Washington Post Fact Checker - PolitiFact
Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media Back to their Original Context
-When an article references a video, picture, or quote ensure the original source has not been altered in some way.

Watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NAkkcxbM5k or visit https://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=1241077&p=9082322 for more in-depth information

A few Questions You can Ask Yourself

Where did I find this?

-Was this on social media, basic Google search, a Wikipedia article?
-Is it common knowledge?
-Did I use the library database?
-Is it from a book, magazine, or other printed material?

Who is the author?

-Is this someone with expertise in their field?
-Is this a first-hand account?
-Do they cite their sources?

How current is this?

-Is this a historical event?
-Has new information made this obsolete?
-Is it too new?

What is the author's purpose?

-Are they neutral/objective or biased?
-Are they trying to sell, persuade, teach, entertain, argue, or inform?
-If arguing a specific viewpoint, do they present any opposing views?
-Is this opinion, propaganda, or fact?
-Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?

Do I trust this?

Don't trust a source where the website/author cannot be determined

Unless it's already associated with a reputable institution like a respected university (like Volpe Library), government program or department, or credible media outlet (like Associated Press).

How do I plan to use this?

-Am I using it as evidence or an example?
-Is this providing necessary context
-Do I disagree or agree?
-Who is my intended audience?

Further Resources

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/establishing_arguments/research_and_evidence.html
https://parlormultimedia.com/writingspaces/past-volumes/assessing-source-credibility-for-crafting-a-well-informed-argument/ https://writing-center.mtsu.edu/res1evaluating/
https://library.hunter.cuny.edu/research-toolkit/how-do-i-use-sources/beam-method