18.2
Understand
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sources.

SKILL 18.2 Understand differences among kinds of sources.

To be an effective researcher, you need to understand the differences among the many kinds of sources that you might use while doing your research. These can be classified in different ways, such as primary versus secondary sources (a scheme that focuses on how you'll use the source in your final paper) or as print versus Web sources (a scheme based on its medium of publication). In this section we'll explain a variety of ways to distinguish among different kinds of sources. Your payoff will be an increased ability to read sources rhetorically and to use them purposefully in your research writing.

Primary and Secondary Sources

Researchers often distinguish between primary and secondary sources. **Primary sources** are the original documents, artifacts, or data that you are actively analyzing; **secondary sources** are works by other people who have analyzed the same documents, artifacts, or data. In short, secondary sources comment upon or analyze primary sources. Table 18.1 presents some examples.

The distinction between primary and secondary sources is sometimes slippery and depends on context. In the media studies example from Table 18.1, the parenting Web site is a secondary source if your research question focuses on *South Park*. But if you are investigating the political biases of parenting Web sites, then this site becomes a primary source.

Some research projects use primary sources extensively, while others mainly or exclusively involve secondary sources. You may be asked, for example, to bring your critical thinking to bear on specific primary sources—for example, gender stereotypes in children's birthday cards, political views expressed in old *Archie* comic books, or legal requirements for "proof" in transcripts from witchcraft trials. In these cases, your secondary research would focus on what other

TABLE 18.1   Examples of Primary and Secondary Sources

Field	Examples of Primary Sources	Examples of Secondary Sources
History	Diaries, speeches, newspaper accounts, letters, manuscripts, official records, old photographs, old news reels, archeological sites	• Scholarly book on European fascism in the 1930s • 1970s film about the rise of the Nazis in Germany
Media studies	Rap lyrics, advertisements, graffiti, episodes of *South Park*, bumper stickers, documentary photographs	• Scholarly journal article analyzing racism in *South Park* • Parenting Web site objecting to *South Park*
Nursing	Patient records, direct observation of patients, research findings on transmission of AIDS virus; public health data on swine flu	• Popular magazine article about nurses working in third world hospital • Blog site focusing on nursing issues

scholars have said about these issues in scholarly books or articles. Modern libraries together with the Internet now make available a wealth of primary sources—government documents, historical archives, slide collections, population or ethnographic data, maps, health data, and so forth.

For other kinds of research projects, particularly those connected to civic issues, students often need to work mainly or exclusively with secondary sources. In trying to decide where you stand, say, on nuclear power plants, on a single-payer medical system, or on immigration policy, you will need to enter the civic conversation about these issues carried on in secondary sources. You'll also need to pay attention to what these secondary sources use as evidence in support of their arguments. Were they able to use primary sources for their evidence? Or does their evidence come from other secondary sources? In trying to evaluate each of these secondary sources, you'll need to employ all your rhetorical skills, as we begin to show in the next section.

Reading Secondary Sources Rhetorically

When you look at a secondary source—whether in stable print form or in often unstable Web form—you need to think rhetorically about the kind of source you are perusing and the original author's purpose in producing the source. In this section we'll look specifically at print sources, which are commonly classified either as books or as periodicals (magazines, newspapers, scholarly journals, and so forth), and contrast them with Web sources. Later, in Skill 19.3, we'll look specifically at ways to read Web sources rhetorically.

Table 18.2 shows how these sources can be analyzed according to genre, publisher, author credentials, and angle of vision. The last column in Table 18.2 identifies contextual clues that will help you recognize what category each of these sources belongs to. We suggest that you take a few moments now to peruse the information in these tables so that you can begin to appreciate the distinctions we are making among types of sources.

Print Sources Versus Web-Only Sources New researchers need to appreciate the differences in stability and reliability between print sources and Web-only sources. Print sources (books, journals, magazines, newspapers) are stable in contrast to materials published on Web sites, which might change hourly. If you work from print sources, you can be sure that others will be able to track down your sources for their own projects. Furthermore, print publications generally go through an editorial review process that helps ensure accuracy and reputability. In contrast, Web-only documents from individuals or small organizations may be unedited and thus unreliable. Because the cost of producing, distributing, and storing print materials is high, books and periodicals are now often published in electronic formats, complicating the distinction between print and Web sources.

These changes mean that when evaluating and citing sources, researchers must now pay attention to whether a source retrieved electronically was originally a print source made available electronically (by being posted to a Web site or contained in a database) or is in fact a Web-only source. You'll need

TABLE 18.2 A Rhetorical Overview of Print Books and Periodicals

Genre and Publisher	Author and Angle of Vision	How to Recognize Them
Books		
SCHOLARLY BOOKS • University/academic presses • Nonprofit • Peer-reviewed	**Author:** Professors, researchers **Angle of vision:** Scholarly advancement of knowledge	• University press on title page • Specialized academic style • Documentation and bibliography • Sometimes available as e-books
TRADE BOOKS (NONFICTION) • Commercial publishers (for example, PenguinPutnam) • Selected for profit potential	**Author:** Journalists, freelancers, scholars aiming at popular audience **Angle of vision:** Varies from informative to persuasive; often well researched and respected, but sometimes shoddy and aimed for quick sale	• Covers designed for marketing appeal • Popular style • Usually documented in an informal rather than an academic style • Sometimes available as e-books
REFERENCE BOOKS • Publishers specializing in reference material • For-profit through library sales	**Author:** Commissioned scholars **Angle of vision:** Balanced, factual overview	• Titles containing words such as *encyclopedia, dictionary,* or *guide* • Found in reference section of library or online through library Web site
Periodicals		
SCHOLARLY JOURNALS • University/academic presses • Nonprofit • Peer-reviewed • Examples: *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, Review of Metaphysics*	**Author:** Professors, researchers, independent scholars **Angle of vision:** Scholarly advancement of knowledge; presentation of research findings; development of new theories and applications	• Not sold on magazine racks • No commercial advertising • Specialized academic style • Documentation and bibliography • Cover often has table of contents • Often can be found in online databases
PUBLIC AFFAIRS MAGAZINES • Commercial, "for-profit" presses • Manuscripts reviewed by editors • Examples: *Harper's, Commonweal, National Review*	**Author:** Staff writers, freelancers, scholars for general audiences **Angle of vision:** Aims to deepen public understanding of issues; magazines often have political bias of left, center, or right	• Long, well-researched articles • Ads aimed at upscale professionals • Often has reviews of books, theater, film, and the arts • Often can be found in online databases or on the Web

TABLE 18.2   *continued*

Genre and Publisher	Author and Angle of Vision	How to Recognize Them
TRADE MAGAZINES • Commercial, "for-profit" presses • Focused on a profession or trade • Examples: *Advertising Age, Automotive Rebuilder, Farm Journal*	**Author:** Staff writers, industry specialists **Angle of vision:** Informative articles for practitioners; advocacy for the profession or trade	• Title indicating trade or profession • Articles on practical job concerns • Ads geared toward a particular trade or profession
NEWSMAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS • Newspaper chains and publishers • Examples: *Time, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times*	**Author:** Staff writers and journalists; occasional freelance pieces **Angle of vision:** News reports aimed at balance and objectivity; editorial pages reflect perspective of editors; op-ed pieces reflect different perspectives	• Readily familiar by name, distinctive cover style • Widely available on newsstands, by subscription, and on the Web • Ads aimed at broad, general audience
POPULAR NICHE MAGAZINES • Large conglomerates or small presses with clear target audience • Focused on special interests of target audience • Examples: *Seventeen, People, TV Guide, Car and Driver, Golf Digest*	**Author:** Staff or freelance writers **Angle of vision:** Varies—in some cases content and point of view are dictated by advertisers or the politics of the publisher	• Glossy paper, extensive ads, lots of visuals • Popular, often distinctive style • Short, undocumented articles • Credentials of writer often not mentioned

to know this information in order to read the source rhetorically, evaluate its trustworthiness, and cite it properly. When you retrieve print sources electronically, be aware that you may lose important contextual clues about the author's purpose and angle of vision—clues that would be immediately apparent in the original print source. These clues come from such things as statements of editorial policy, other articles in the same magazine or journal, or advertisements targeting specific audiences. (The increasing availability of *.pdf* or *portable document format* files, which reproduce the appearance of the original print page, makes understanding publication contexts much easier. When .pdf format is available, take advantage of it.)

Scholarly Books and Journal Articles Versus Trade Books and Magazines Note in Table 18.2 the distinction between scholarly books or journal articles, which are peer-reviewed and published by nonprofit academic presses, and trade books or magazines, which are published by for-profit presses.

By **peer review,** which is a highly prized concept in academia, we mean the selection process by which scholarly manuscripts get chosen for publication. When manuscripts are submitted to an academic publisher, the editor sends them for independent review to experienced scholars who judge the rigor and accuracy of the research and the significance and value of the argument. The process is highly competitive and weeds out much shoddy or trivial work.

In contrast, trade books and magazines are not peer-reviewed by independent scholars. Instead, they are selected for publication by editors whose business is to make a profit. Fortunately, it can be profitable for popular presses to publish superbly researched and argued material because college-educated people, as lifelong learners, create a demand for intellectually satisfying trade books or magazines written for the general reader rather than for the highly specialized reader. These can be excellent sources for undergraduate research, but you need to separate the trash from the treasure. Trade books and magazines are aimed at many different audiences and market segments and can include sloppy, unreliable, and heavily biased material.

Encyclopedias, Wikipedia, and Other Reference Books and Wikis

Another kind of source is an encyclopedia or other kind of reference work. These are sometimes called "tertiary sources" because they provide distilled background information derived from primary and secondary sources. Encyclopedias and reference works are excellent starting places at the beginning of a research project. New researchers, however, should be aware of the difference between a commissioned encyclopedia article and an article in the online source *Wikipedia.* Professional encyclopedia companies such as *Encyclopedia Britannica* commission highly regarded scholars with particular expertise in a subject to write that subject's encyclopedia entry. Usually the entry is signed so that the author can be identified. In contrast, all forms of wikis—including *Wikipedia*—are communal projects using collaborative wiki software. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* (its official name) is written communally by volunteers; anyone who follows the site's procedures can edit an entry. The entry's accuracy and angle of vision depend on collective revisions by interested readers.

Wikipedia is a fascinating cultural product that provides rapid overview information, but it is not a reliable academic source. It is often accused of inaccurate information, editorial bias, and shifting content because of constant revisions by readers. Most instructors will not accept *Wikipedia* as a factual or informative source.

FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

Identifying Types of Sources

Your instructor will bring to class a variety of sources—different kinds of books, scholarly journals, magazines, and downloaded material. Working individually or in small groups, try to decide which category in Table 18.2 each piece belongs to. Be prepared to justify your decisions on the basis of the cues you used to make your decision.

SKILL 18.3 U
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