

ACADEMIC SOURCES (PODCAST 16 TRANSCRIPT)

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Greetings, everyone! This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to talk about the value of academic sources when conducting research.

Let's face it: With the Internet, it's as simple as a Google search to find content on any imaginable topic. When conducting research, it is important to find the best quality sources possible, for the quality of the sources has a direct impact on the credibility of what the writer has to say. This is especially important when conducting academic research. Everyone has heard the dictum to stay away from the Internet, for content found on the Internet is typically suspect. While this advice is good, the Internet has evolved and— though there is no shortage of spurious sites—nowadays quality sources are bountiful on the Internet. However, you still need to proceed with caution because you don't want to use just any old sources you find.

When writing a research-based paper, the best sources to use, hands-down, are what are called **academic sources**. I know, the very sound of *academic sources* makes your stomach turn. I've heard it all: academic sources are dry and boring; academic sources are written for a limited audience, not for regular people. Well, maybe, but it's all how you look at it. An academic source is based on research and/or first-hand experience by someone who is an expert in a particular area. The focus of academic articles is limited and detailed.

The audience for academic sources includes people in the same field—hence the depth of the discussion and the use of specialized language. Does this make the content boring? Well, not to people in the field who get to read about the results of months and even years of research. In many ways this kind of content is exciting because it's content written by people actively engaged in specific research within the field. These folks are the experts!

Academic sources are also typically peer-reviewed, which means that other experts within the same field have examined the information and given it their stamp of approval before the material is published in scholarly journals and professional publications.

Admittedly for most student-researchers, reading through academic content may be more challenging than reading content found on web sites or newspapers, but the quality of the content will be top-drawer.

Again, this is not to say you will not find quality content elsewhere—you can, if you look hard enough. Many web sites and professional organizations make available versions of journal articles and there is no denying that an organizational web site like the Centers for Disease Control will contain credible content. And of course there are newspapers such as the New York Times or Washington Post, not to mention other journalistic sources like CNN contain good information. However, there is a big



difference between popular-media type sources and academic sources. Remember academic sources have gone through a rigorous peer-review process by other experts before the content ever reaches readers. These experts make sure the research is valid and the discussion substantive. Sometimes the writers are asked to edit and revise. What gets published adds something meaningful to the professional discussion of the topic.

Of course there are times when using popular media sources or web sites makes more sense, but as a general rule, strive to find high-quality, research-based content whenever possible.

This about the value of academic sources like this: If you had back pain, you would likely visit your regular doctor, the same doctor you visit for a bad cough or persistent headaches. While your primary care physician knows a lot, this person is not an expert on back pain, and if your back pain persists, you would be referred to a back specialist. Academic sources contain information from specialists, and hence they are the best type of source to use and will carry the most credibility and clout.

I have read my fair share of research papers in which the writers had interesting and compelling things to say but who, unfortunately, used questionable sources as support. I've found papers that included content from web sites that simply listed facts and statistics related to the topic. Who conducted the research or where those numbers came from was impossible to tell, but the numbers were laid out nicely on the informational web page. I've seen "articles" four paragraphs long and full of quotes that writers used to support key points of the discussion. Blinking all around the four paragraphs were ads for this, that, and the other. Is a four-paragraph article from a web site advertising an array of products really going to cut the mustard in a research-based essay? Probably not, right? Keep in mind that credibility is everything and if you use eyebrow-furrowing sources, what you have to say in your paper will become suspect and so, too, will your credibility.

This is why using academic sources should be high on your priority list when conducting research. Simply put, academic sources will contain the best research-based information on your topic and will bode well for your credibility as a writer.

One last point: You are probably saying, "Ok, I got it, but where should I look for academic sources?" You can find academic sources on the Internet, but doing so is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Nowadays, you usually can find academic sources electronically via a library you have the rights to use. (You can also go to the actual, physical, brick-and-mortar structure if you would like.) Most libraries make the process of searching electronically a breeze—a process that involves entering search criteria, limiting the search to journal articles and/or peer reviewed articles, and pressing "go"—that's it! In a flash, you will be presented with a list of high-quality sources that match your search criteria.

Lastly, keep in mind that when conducting research, shortcuts do not exist. Research takes time. Resign yourself to that given and put in the necessary effort to search for and locate the best possible sources—*academic* sources—you can. You won't be sorry.

Thanks for listening. Happy writing!

