



How to Find a Reliable Online Source

There is a lot of information online but not all of it is accurate or reliable. Making sure that you have good source material is the first step towards developing a great essay or project. But how can you tell the difference between a good source and a bad one? The following tips will help you decide and make choosing sources a little easier.

#1

What is a reliable source?

A reliable source is one that gives an objective and unbiased description of the topic. If a writer is offering many opinions, but not much evidence to support them, it is probably not a reliable source. The best sources are usually from scholars who specialize in that topic, journalists working at professional news organizations like the CBC, or professionally edited and fact-checked sites like *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Before you trust a source find out who they are.

Watch out for Wikipedia!

Wikipedia will often be the first link that comes up when you do an Internet search on a topic. Wikipedia is useful, but it is not necessarily an accurate or reliable source. Anybody can edit Wikipedia, which means that bad information is mixed in with the good. But Wikipedia can be a great way to get a general overview of your topic and learn some details that help you do more careful searches. Also, take a look at the footnotes or further resources at the bottom of the page. Some of those might be excellent sources that would be useful for your project.

#2

Narrow your search terms

#3

The Internet is a big place and you often get out of it what you put in. If you want to find specific information about, for example, the First World War or the history of First Nations in Canada, you may not get many useful sources if you only put those broad topics into a search engine. Instead, add qualifying words to those topics to narrow your results. For example, if your paper is about the history of First Nations health, use search terms like "First Nations Canada History Health." It will be much easier to find a source relevant for your essay.

#4

Websites where you can find reliable sources

Libraries, museums, and government websites such as the Canadian Museum of History, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Saskatchewan Archives Board, the Royal BC Museum, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and Parks Canada are great places to find reliable sources. Other websites such as HistoricaCanada.ca, CanadasHistory.ca, VirtualMuseum.ca, Canadiana.ca and ActiveHistory.ca will also have reliable sources. Scholarly sources are the most reliable ones you can use since they are written by professional historians and often published in a journal that was carefully reviewed by other historians. If your school doesn't have a subscription to these journals they can be hard to access, but there is still a way to do so online. The website Google Scholar gives you only scholarly sources that fit your search terms. And, don't forget that *The Canadian Encyclopedia* contains over 19,000 professionally edited and fact-checked articles on historical subjects.

#5

Finding Primary Sources

Teachers love it when you use primary sources. A primary source is anything written during the time period that your essay covers. They can be letters, memoirs, books, or newspaper articles. But finding primary sources can be difficult unless you know where to look. Fortunately, there are some great resources that every student of history should know about. You can find a treasure trove of Canadian sources at the Library and Archives Canada website. For primary sources from around the world, the website archive.org has a huge collection on every possible topic. You can also search in Google Books. After you enter your search terms, at the top of the page you will see a menu item that says "Any time." Click on that and then you can choose the time period you are researching. You can even choose specific years!