In order to have a successful presentation, you should use credible sources to support your argument. Here are some suggestions for finding and using quality, credible sources. This guide sheet will walk you through the four steps of defining, finding, evaluating, and tracking sources.

**Step 1: Defining a Source**

A source is a piece of information used to develop and support your ideas. Sources are external to your own experiences and must be cited to avoid plagiarism.

There are four main types of source material:
- Written – books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, legal transcripts
- Multimedia – TV, YouTube, news clips, movies, pictures, radio
- Electronic sources – websites, blogs, online journals
- Testimony/Interview – polls, interviews

**Step 2: Locating Sources**

Using a credible search engine is a great starting place for locating sources. Libraries, databases, Google Scholar, and government websites are helpful places to start searching.

*Good places to start the search for sources:*
  - lib.usm.edu (many university libraries offer access to professional databases)
  - scholar.google.com (an index of full text scholarly work from many disciplines)

*Note*: Wikipedia.org, about.com, procon.org and other online encyclopedias are not typically the strongest sources! Use these tools only as a springboard to finding better sources. For example, Wikipedia often has links to articles, websites, and news sources that serve as credible locations to gather information.

**Step 3: Evaluating Sources**

Sources must meet several criteria to be considered credible. Before using a source, check to make sure it meets the requirements below.

*Authority*: The author of the source should be an authority on the subject. An expert source has applicable education and experience, as well as a solid reputation.
Accuracy: The source should be validated through peer-review or other measures. This means that other experts have reviewed the material and consider it credible. Typically, if the source is peer-reviewed, it will be published in a scholarly journal in the field you are researching.

Objectivity: The source should be free from bias. It should use facts, sound reason and logic to support its arguments. Consider what the source has to gain from convincing you (money, support, etc.), depending on how big the stakes are tread carefully!

Recency: The source should reflect the most recent information on the topic. Generally, newer evidence is more reliable because it is up to date. If you have to choose between two equally credible sources, choose the one that is most recent. However, some older sources maybe considered foundational pieces.

Step 4: Tracking Sources

Keeping up with the location and information associated with each source is vital to creating a quality reference page.

Print or copy the article, news report, journal entry, book chapter, etc. List this information for each source:
- Author(s)
- Title
- Publication date
- Name of the book, journal, magazine, website, etc.
- Publication location
- Relevant information from the source (quotes, statistics, paraphrasing, etc.)

Put every source you use on the reference or works cited page.

Consider using notecards for the quick referencing and organizing of sources

Use a citation manager for bigger projects (EndNote, Mendeley, etc.)

Cite as you go, creating a bibliography after the project is complete can be a hassle and tiresome. So keep up with citations as you go.

For more information on how to use sources, see our “Citing Sources” guide sheet.