In this video, you'll find out why you need to be sure the sources you use in your paper are good ones. You'll also learn some important criteria for evaluating whether your sources are good or bad.
First, we'll look at why you need to use good sources.

When most students are searching for sources, they try to find just as many sources as they need as quickly as they can, and move on. Unfortunately, this isn't always the best approach. It is better to focus on getting good sources than on finding sources fast. That might take a bit more time and effort.
Why are good sources so important? Your sources form the foundation of your paper. Just like in a house, a solid foundation is important. If you have good support, everything works the way it is supposed to.

If you don't have a good foundation, it causes problems. Your arguments need to be supported properly, just like the walls of a house. In either case, a bad foundation leads to a bad structure.
Using Good Sources: Evaluating What You Find

Starting off with good sources gives your paper a solid foundation that you can build on with confidence. Starting off with bad sources means your paper won’t be well supported. You will run into difficulties when writing your paper, and your results won’t be as good.

Criteria for Evaluating Sources

Now we know why good sources are important. Next, we’ll look at how we can judge whether a source is good or not.
There are two basic criteria to use when evaluating your sources.

The first is that the sources should be scholarly or peer-reviewed.

Nearly all of your assignments require you to use scholarly sources, whether they say so explicitly in the instructions or not.

Scholarly articles are written by people affiliated with a university. They usually include an abstract or summary of the article.

The content consists of original research done by the authors, gives the method for the research study, and discusses the results or findings of the study.

There are many references to other sources given in a bibliography or list of references.
Some other things also count as scholarly sources.

The major example is research done and published by authorities working at a major government body like Statistics Canada or the United Nations. These agencies often gather and provide data and statistics and write reports based on their research findings. This would also be considered scholarly, and therefore a good source for most assignments.

You'll find lots of other information out there that doesn't come from scholarly sources. This includes blogs, social media, newspapers, magazines like Macleans, online sites like Wikipedia, and in fact most web sites. Unless the information was published in a scholarly journal or government forum by an expert author with academic affiliation and credentials, it's not scholarly.
Normally, you wouldn’t use information that isn’t scholarly unless your instructions say you should.

The exception is if you use the information as a primary source.

Primary sources are sources that you do analysis on yourself.

For example, if I was doing a paper on media representations of female athletes, I could look at online news articles talking about female athletes.

To use these as primary sources, I would do an analysis to see how the news articles portray female athletes, and come up with an argument based on my analysis.

Basically I would conduct my own research study using the news articles as my research data.

After that, though, I would still need to use several scholarly sources to support my arguments.

Scholarly sources should be the foundation of your assignment in nearly all cases, so make sure you use them.
One way to do this is to search for information using the Library's web site.

You can search for scholarly information in Primo, the Library's catalogue, from the library's main web site.

Or, you can use the Library's specialized databases on different subjects.

These can be found under the Databases link on the main page.

Click on By Subject to find a list.
You’ll still need to be sure you limit to only scholarly or peer-reviewed articles. Primo and all databases have this option.

Look for a “peer-reviewed” check box on the main search page, or look at the options to limit or filter your results once you do your search.

The second main criteria for evaluating your sources is relevance. You need to make sure your sources are relevant to your topic. This sounds easy, but is actually tricky. Most people just look for whatever they can find easily on their topic, assuming that most of what is out there on the topic is relevant.
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In reality, though, only a few of the sources out there on your topic are actually relevant to your paper. How can you tell which ones those are?

One of the easiest ways is to turn your topic into a question. For example, say your topic is female athletes in the media. Pose your topic as a question, like How are female athletes portrayed in the media? This is called a research question. Having a research question helps you focus your research more effectively.
When you are looking for sources, you need to find things that help you answer your research question. This will help you easily weed out lots of things that might be on your topic, but aren't necessarily helpful for answering the specific question you are researching.

When you do a search and get lots of results, this makes it easier to evaluate which ones will be relevant. Keeping in mind my research question, how are female athletes portrayed in the media, we can see that quite a few of the results are not that helpful in answering the question, even though they are on the topic of female athletes and media.
Focusing your research around a question, and using that question to help identify the relevant sources and the relevant parts of those sources, will help make your research and reading more efficient.

You know what you are looking for, so you will save time when you are searching.

You will also end up with sources that are scholarly and relevant, and which will help build a good foundation for the arguments in your paper.

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