

**Types of Information Sources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Information Type** | **Characteristics** | **When to Use** |
| **Reference Books**Includes:* Dictionaries
* Encyclopedias
* Handbooks
* Yearbooks
 | General and subject-specific reference books provide brief overviews or summaries on any given topic. They can include background information, factual data, key ideas, important dates, and concepts. | * If you know very little about your topic, reference sources are an excellent place to start research.
 |
| **Circulating Books****Includes:*** Fiction
* Nonfiction
 | Books typically provide an in-depth examination of any given topic, usually from a retrospective point of view. Research-oriented books are works of non-fiction. Fiction works include novels, short stories, and poetry. | If you need:* Historical and detailed information on a subject, such as the United States Civil War.
* To put your topic in context with other important issues.
* Several points of view in one book such as collected critical essays on Shakespeare’s works.
 |
| **Journal Articles****Also known as:*** **Peer-reviewed articles**
* **Refereed articles**
* **Scholarly articles**
 | Journal articles provide in-depth research on very specific topics. Journals cover a wide variety of disciplines. Articles are written by experts in the field and use vocabulary or jargon from a particular field of study. In addition, articles usually have cited references that will point you to other relevant research. Journal articles tend to be lengthy and are typically published on a monthly or quarterly basis. | If you need:* Scholarly articles or original research
* To find out what has been studied on your topic
* References that point to other relevant research.
 |
| **Magazine & Newspaper Articles**Also known as:* Popular articles
 | Magazine and newspaper articles provide up-to-date information on the latest developments on various issues or current events. Issues and events covered can be local, regional, national, and worldwide. Articles are usually written by freelance writers and many times articles can be unsigned. Articles are written for a general audience and contain simpler vocabulary. Articles tend to be short in length and are typically published on a daily (newspapers), weekly or monthly basis (magazines). | If you need:* Up-to-date information about current issues, popular culture, or international, national and local events.
* Various points of view or popular opinions (e.g., editorials, commentaries).
 |

*Created by Reynolds Community College Libraries. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.*

 *Last updated on 7/14/2023.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Information Type** | **Characteristics** | **When to Use** |
| **Web**Includes:* Company, education, government, and organization websites
* News sites
* Blogs
* Social media
* Articles
* eBooks
* Videos
 | The web allows you to access most types of information including multimedia on the Internet through a web browser such as Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge. One of the main features of the web is the ability to quickly link to information. The web contains information beyond plain text, including audio, images and video. Since anyone can publish on the web, you need to carefully evaluate what you retrieve through search engines such as Google. | If you need:* Information on current news and events
* Expert and popular opinions on various issues
* Company information
* You need information from all levels of government
* Resources provided through the Reynolds Libraries databases
 |
| **Government Sources****Include:*** Legislation
* Reports
* Statistics
 | Government sources from all levels of government (international, national, state and local) provide both historical and current information including legislation, reports and statistical data.   | If you need:* Legislation from a specific area or level of government.
* Reports or studies conducted by a government agency on a specific topic.
* Historical or current data collected by the government on a specific topic or demographic.
 |
| **Primary Sources****Include:*** Diaries
* Interviews
* Letters
* Manuscripts
* Memoirs
* Speeches
* Statistics
* Works of art
 | Primary sources provide first-hand experiences of events. Information is generally presented in its original form: a work of art or literature; an account of an event; an experience; or original documents.  | If you need:* Original research or statistics.
* A first-hand account of experiences or events.
 |
| **Secondary Sources****Include:*** **Articles**
* **Books**
* **Videos**
* **Websites**
 | Secondary sources provide second-hand accounts of events. These sources include materials that have been reported, analyzed, or interpreted by people who do not have first-hand knowledge of an event.  | If you need:* A second-hand account of experiences or events.
 |