

Speech Research: Source Evaluation

Transcript

1. Speech Research: Source Evaluation
2. So you have a speech assignment that requires using a few sources. Maybe it's just three, maybe it's seven. Maybe it's more. How do you decide which sources to use? First, you need to read your assignment. Does your instructor provide any guidance? Can you use internet sources? Are you required to use a print source? Do you need to find a scholarly journal article from the Library's databases? Once you know the source requirements of your speech, you can start thinking about where to look and how to select the best information. There are really just two questions you need to ask yourself when you're looking for sources: Is the information useful and is the information good? Let's examine what those two questions are really asking.
3. It might seem obvious, but you really need information that's useful to your research. Usefulness can mean a few things. Here are some questions to consider when you're picking a source for your speech:
 - How does this article or item contribute to my overall project?
 - What are its flaws, weaknesses, gaps?
 - What are its strengths, values, and contributions to the field?
 - What evidence did the author use?
 - What are the main themes?
 - What are the connections between the themes?
 - How do your sources connect to each other? Where do they overlap or contradict each other?Just because a book or article or website is on the same subject as your speech, doesn't mean it's necessarily going to be useful for your research.
4. Your next consideration is whether the information is credible, unbiased, timely and correct. These four criteria are useful when looking at all kinds of resources, but are especially helpful when you're looking at web sources. Let's take a look at each of these points individually.
5. So who created the source you're looking at? Why should you believe anything they have to say? Is the author and expert? Is the publisher well-known? Is the organization trustworthy? Who says so? Authority and credibility is the first and biggest hurdle you need to clear when evaluating a source for quality. Look for author credentials and affiliations or seek out scholarly sources.
6. Next, think about why this source was created. Is it designed to provide facts? To educate the public? Is it persuasive? Is it someone's opinion? Is the information provided to encourage you to buy something? There aren't good purposes and bad purposes, but the intent of the information will matter depending on the kind of speech you're doing. Just make sure you notice the purpose of your source and keep it in mind when you're continuing your research.
7. How old is the source you're looking at? If you're preparing an informative speech on the Civil War, it might not matter if the book you're reading is 4 years old or 40 years old. If you're researching a technology, medical or scientific topic, though, you want to make sure your source is as up-to-date as possible. On websites, look for a last-updated date, revision date or at least a copyright date.

8. Whether the information in your source is correct can be hard to tell. Ultimately, this decision is up to you. And that is the reason why you should look at five, seven, twelve sources when you're doing your research—so you can compare the information from one source with the information in another. Are the differences? Similarities? Check to see if your sources are telling you where they got their information. Look for bibliographies, footnotes and other references.
9. One more thing to think about when you're picking a good source is how easy it is to use. Who is the intended audience? If it's a book designed for little kids and your audience is adults, you might want to reconsider. At the same time, some scholarly resources are going to be way more detailed than you need for a short speech. Think about your audience, your topic and the length and purpose of your speech when picking a source.
10. Why is this so important? Why can't you just find five books on your topic and be done with it? Let's say you're preparing an informative speech about Bill Gates. You have two possible sources of information about him—you can call Bill Gates on the phone and interview him in person, or you can talk to your cousin's ex-boyfriend's father who lived next door the woman who used to cut Bill Gates' hair. Which source are you going to use? The source that comes from the expert (a biographer, a professor, a scientist, a professional journalist) is always going to be the best source. Using it is the smart thing to do because it makes you look smarter.
11. In the end, you want to pick the sources that back up whatever it is you want to share with your audience. Find the best examples, the best case histories, the best facts, the best quotes, the best statistics—whatever you need, whatever you use, pick the best that's out there and make your speech the best speech possible.
12. Need some help finding the best sources? Contact the speech librarian at kelseyj@cod.edu. See? Speech Research—it's not so bad.