

## Choosing sources

Each time you think about using a source, ask yourself 'How am I going to use it? What cognitive ability will I use?' If you are merely describing or summarising it, it is not likely to be relevant.

As a simple guide to help you come to a decision, work through the following questions.

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### Choosing sources – checklist

<b>1 Synthesis</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Do you know how you will synthesise this article with others to create a meaningful picture that the reader can understand?</i>	
<b>2 Critical evaluation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Have you critically examined the article – its assumptions, design and findings – and compared it with other articles?</i>	
<b>3 Analysis</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Have you analysed and considered the implications of the arguments and concepts the author uses? Have you revealed and assessed all the implications of the article's conclusions?</i>	
<b>4 Relevance</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Is there a clear link between this article and your own research question? Is it important for laying down the foundations of your own research project or, in a stand-alone review, the work of others?</i>	
<b>5 An alternative view</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Does this article represent a contrast to other articles by presenting an alternative interpretation of your research question? Does it represent an alternative approach to it? Does it present different findings that challenge your own view?</i>	
<b>6 Organising structure</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Does this article present a general, synoptic point of view that would give your review a way of organising the different elements into a coherent and comprehensive overview?</i>	

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Of course, now that you know how you're going to use an article you may also have decided that the content of the article is relevant. But some articles can be misleadingly convincing simply on the grounds that we know how we could use them, even though their content may not be relevant.

So, to be sure, we need to check that its content is relevant to our research question. As with the first question, it helps to make our decision if we have by our side clear criteria.

The following list contains seven questions you can work your way through as you consider each source. Each one contains ideas on how you might use the content. If it's not useful in any of these ways, then reject it.

### Checking for relevancy – checklist

1	What's in it that gives you <b>ideas</b> on which to build your own project?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Is there anything in it that reveals the <b>current debate</b> on the topic? What are the differences between the contributors? Are there any unsolved problems? Map out the <b>cross-connections</b> you find in the articles. If there are references to another article, make a note of where you saw it and record what the first author said about it.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Does it outline different <b>perceptions</b> of what the problem is and different ideas about how it should be tackled?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Does it indicate how many different <b>aspects</b> there are to the problem? If so, analyse it. Then, in the review you could pick up and discuss each aspect in turn, making clear what there is in the literature on each one. Out of this you could develop your own contribution.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Is there anything in it that reveals the main <b>theories</b> and related <b>concepts</b> that are used by different contributors? If there is, in your review make clear the differences and similarities between them. Then you could go on to evaluate each one for their internal consistency. If you're writing a dissertation or thesis, later you could assess them for their consistency with the data you collect and the observations you make.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Are there <b>omissions</b> in the article? Has the writer overlooked something? In your review you could make this clear and justify your conclusion. If you're writing a dissertation or thesis, you could then outline what you will be doing in your own research that doesn't overlook the same thing.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Is the article useful in identifying the different <b>methodologies</b> ? You could review the different ones, identifying their key features, before you then indicate the sort of strategy that would best meet the demands of the topic you have chosen.	<input type="checkbox"/>

For more information, see *How to Write Your Literature Review*, Chapter 17.