Types of Information Sources

- **Books**
  
  Books generally provide in-depth and lengthy coverage on a given subject, but because of the amount of time involved to write and publish, the information is not always current. Lack of currency is only a concern if you are researching a topic that requires the most current information available. Books provide an excellent way to get an overview of a topic and will probably be heavily referenced with suggestions for further reading. If you are unsure of the merit of a book, consult a book review published in a professional journal of the given subject area. You can search for books in the Murphy Library Catalog.

- **Book Reviews**
  
  Book reviews are good indicators of a work's value to a given subject area, especially if you are somewhat unfamiliar with a given field of study. As always, consider the source of the review. One that appears within a scholarly journal of the field in which you are doing research has more authority. See Murphy Library’s Book Review LibGuide to locate book reviews.

- **Newspapers**
  
  Daily newspapers are a great source for information on current events, such as climate change or crime. Older editions provide day-to-day coverage of past events such as the oil embargo and even the Civil War. Newspapers reflect our current culture and are an excellent way to stay in touch with the big issues of the day. Journalists are experts at covering and writing an informational story, however, and are not considered experts in whatever field they are writing about. Newspapers and newspaper articles are available through a variety of resources; see Murphy Library’s Finding News Articles LibGuide for more information.

- **Journal articles**
  
  Many scholars communicate their research through journal articles. Scholarly journal articles have gone through a process called peer-review, in which other experts in the field review the research. If these experts deem the research worthy, it is published. Compared to books, journal articles tightly focus on a specific aspect of a topic, and are less useful for general overviews or histories of a topic. While a book may cover a survey of poverty in America, a journal article might be a research study on the effects of the economic downturn on children in Cleveland, Ohio. Journal articles are indexed in article databases like EBSCOhost’s Academic Search Complete and SocINDEX with Full Text; see Murphy Library’s Articles & Databases by Title and Most Popular Databases for access to these resources.
Internet Sources/Web Sites

A colleague of mine refers to the Internet as the Wild, Wild West. While he was referring to the Internet circa 1996, the label still rings true. Anyone can post anything on the Internet, and usually in under five minutes. The Internet is a great resource for getting current information on a variety of topics, but you should always carefully consider the source. Many valuable information sources are available through the internet, but just like the books and journal article you will use in your research, web sites need careful evaluation.

Government Documents

U.S. Government documents are excellent sources of information on a variety of topics, such as business, science, law, criminal justice, etc. These primary documents, published under the auspices of the federal government, provide vital information such as census data, Supreme Court transactions, federal rules and regulations. Please see Murphy Library’s Government Information LibGuide for access to these resources.

Dissertations

Dissertations generally cover a narrow topic but do so in great detail. The authority of the work is generally without question as all are produced under the guidance of an academic committee within a university. To gauge the value of the information to a given field of study, check to see if it was published. A published dissertation has made it through the extra review process of a particular press, and therefore, it is likely to be more authoritative than a similar paper that has not been published. Search for Dissertations through Murphy Library’s Dissertations & Theses database.

Statistics

Data can present a powerful, visual way to display certain economic, demographic, or factual information supporting any number of arguments or views. Murphy Library provides many librarian-reviewed and approved gateways through our Statistics LibGuide. Think that statistical data cannot be manipulated? Please take a look at this book: How to lie with statistics by Darrell Huff or take a look at some of the statistical abuse as shown on this faculty web page from the University of Washington.