

Choosing Appropriate Resources for Academic Papers

Generally speaking, academic assignments at Liberty University require support by scholarly resources (versus "popular" resources). Scholarly resources are written *by* academics or professionals recognized as experts in a field of study (usually by having attained advanced degrees), *for* an audience of scholarly or professional peers. Popular resources are usually trade publications by entities that are not peer-reviewed, written for a general audience; they may contain opinions or be designed to entertain or persuade. Some programs of study (i.e., Business or Education) allow non-scholarly resources more than others.

Well-respected, well-known organizations, such as the American Medical Association, are generally considered as reliable Internet sources to use, even if there is no individual author named. Content published on a company's website is credited as belonging to that corporate author unless an individual author is named. (*Be sure to check the relevant quick guide for how to cite websites, both with a named author and without, in each of the formatting styles.*) One quick measure of the credibility of a website's is readily available in its domain: Websites that end in .gov, .edu, or .mil are generally reliable and trusted. Websites of non-profit organizations (ending in .org) can be useful, but they generally promote that entity's own agenda and may not be reliable or trustworthy; students must use their own personal judgment to discern whether or not to use such sources.

Sometimes, students are permitted or even required by their instructors to seek non-scholarly sources of information. For example, Business students might need to report on current economic or management trends. Education students might need to find an article containing the preceding year's enrollment statistics for a particular school district. Unless your instructions and grading rubric specifically permit, students should avoid consulting resources such as Wikipedia and popular "answer" sites (i.e., Quora, answers.com, blurtit.com). Such popular answer sites provide answers to anyone *from* anyone; responses that sound the most plausible are often rated the most highly by users, but this is no guarantee that the "popularity contest winner's" facts have actually been checked. Unlike *Wikipedia*, popular answer sites do not solicit references—they simply require an Internet connection and a willingness to share knowledge and expertise anonymously. Both options in this category are deemed as non-scholarly, however, and should be used sparingly when allowed.

The safest and most reliable option to find suitable resources for academic assignments is to search the Jerry Falwell Library for scholarly and peer-reviewed resources whenever possible (i.e., in virtually all Liberty University class assignments, with few exceptions). The easiest way to limit your research to just scholarly, peer-reviewed resources is to search in Liberty University's Jerry Falwell Library (rather than Google or another Internet search browser). There are several ways to restrict your searches to filter out any non-scholarly resources in the library's repository. All three are demonstrated visually in this [brief video tutorial](#) (along with a discussion of the pros and cons of each option).

The Jerry Falwell Library also has a number of excellent webinars under the [Research Workshops](#) tab, including program-specific suggestions. **The Jerry Falwell Library staff and librarians have also created extensive “Research Guides” that cover a variety of topics and group relevant resources and databases by subject for each program of study/degree major.** The red-colored tabs at the top of each page are organized by resource type and provide links to program-specific resources (see this [brief video tutorial for a quick run-through of how to use the Research Guides](#) for your specific program of study):

- [Academic Affairs for Athletics](#)
- [Aeronautics](#)
- [Allied Health](#)
- [Biology & Chemistry](#)
- [Business](#)
- [College of Applied Studies and Academic Success \(CASAS\)](#)
- [Cinematic & Theater Arts](#)
- [College of General Studies](#)
- [Counseling & Psychology](#)
- [Digital Media and Communication Arts](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Engineering](#)
- [English](#)
- [Family and Consumer Sciences](#)
- [Government](#)
- [History](#)
- [Mathematics](#)
- [Modern Languages](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Nursing](#)
- [Public & Community Health](#)
- [Religion & Philosophy](#)
- [Social Work](#)
- [Sport, Event, & Tourism Management](#)
- [Studio and Digital Arts](#)

For more help learning how to research efficiently, students can also view webinars available in Liberty University’s Instructional Media, including [this one on how to search for sources in the Jerry Falwell Library](#) (which includes instructions on how to search specific databases for specific programs of study). ***As that instructional video stresses, please be sure to check any references produced in the citation-generated feature within the Jerry Falwell Online Library, as those often contain formatting errors.*** That video also educates online students about the interlibrary “ILIAD” system (beginning at 6:00), whereby they can request and receive hard copies of books that are not available electronically, just as if they checked those out from their local library (postage to the student is paid by Liberty University; the student only pays the postage cost to return the book at the end of the check-out period). Students should take full advantage of all of the excellent resources Liberty University provides its students to excel academically!