

Types of Information Resources and Their Relative Strengths, Considerations, and Audiences

Information Source	Strengths	Considerations	Target Audience
Invisible College: Unfiltered, informal communications by people with an interest in a topic or discipline. Ex. E-mail, blogs, conference papers, wikis, web pages.	Often available sooner than conventional communication. Opens up debate to the reader/user. New access via the web – used to be difficult to find.	Quality varies greatly. Bias is present. Must confirm “facts.” Assumes previous familiarity with issue. Not good for gathering background but good for clues, tips, and ideas.	Any group sharing a common interest.
News: “Daily” “publications” that contain accounts of current events. Ex. Broadcast news from TV/cable, wire feeds, newspapers, news blogs.	Immediate access to breaking stories. Regular and frequent updates. First-hand interviews and footage. Local perspectives on a story. Track information over time.	Stories can disappear – not always archived. Possible bias and/or sensationalism. Web versions of newspapers may be different from print version. Published daily.	General public. People living in a certain area or region.
Popular magazines: Publications for general public offering topical information that is easily read and digested. Ex. <i>Newsweek</i> , <i>National Geographic</i> , <i>Forbes</i> .	Insight into what the public thinks about issues. Possible source of background information bits and vocabulary.	May be useful for clues even if not permitted as citation in paper. Bias pitfalls – editorial slants. Non-scholarly. Published weekly or monthly.	General public.
Scholarly journals: Publications containing research reports and scholarly papers. Ex. <i>Psychology and Theology</i> , <i>Musical Times</i> , <i>Renaissance Studies Quarterly</i> .	Research and scholarly content. Bibliographies and footnotes. Editorial filtering ensures high credibility. In-depth analysis of narrowly-focused subjects.	Difficult to read – dense writing, technical “jargon,” long articles. Published monthly or quarterly on topics older than that.	Scholars, researchers, and professionals within a discipline.
Books: Publications of one or more volumes bound between two covers. May consist of collection of papers by multiple authors or content generated by a single author.	Broad overviews of topics. Length allows in-depth exploration of ideas. Scholarly books contain bibliographies that are starting points for further research.	Dated – publication cycle prevents current events from being covered. Longer to read than articles. Popular books often not well-researched but can suggest ideas.	General public, scholars, or professionals within a discipline.
Government publications: Information from all levels of government, including United Nations. Contain data, demographic information, texts of bills or laws, and research accounts.	Especially useful for laws and statistics.	Foreign government information may be difficult to get. Difficult to find U.S. government information without some assistance.	General public, scholars, or professionals within a discipline.
Reference works: Encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, and other summaries of information.	Intended as starting points for research. Sources of quick facts. Explain new vocabulary. Lists of information on a topic.	Tools for finding other resources. Source to give you information and language to begin thinking about a topic.	General public, scholars, or professionals within a discipline.