KNOW YOUR RESEARCH SOURCES

A doctoral researcher's guide to selecting, evaluating, and using scholarly literature.

SOURCE TYPE	WHAT IT IS	BEST USE
Peer-reviewed empirical article	Original study assessed by expert reviewers before publication.	Evidence about findings, methods, and research gaps.
Seminal work	Foundational or highly influential contribution; may be a book or article.	Origins of theories, constructs, and debates.
Scholarly journal article	Article in an academic journal; not every item is peer reviewed.	Research, commentary, theoretical discussion, or reviews.
Systematic review	Structured synthesis with explicit search and eligibility methods.	What the body of evidence supports and where it is limited.
Meta-analysis	Statistical combination of compatible quantitative findings.	Estimated overall effects and variation across studies.
Scoping review	Maps the scope and characteristics of research in a field.	Emerging themes and areas with limited evidence.
White paper	Organization-produced analysis, recommendations, or advocacy.	Industry and policy context; assess sponsorship and evidence.
Scholarly book	Extended academic examination of a topic.	Theory, historical development, and conceptual grounding.
Edited book chapter	Specialist chapter in a collection, with variable review practices.	Focused perspectives and theoretical background.
Dissertation or thesis	Graduate research evaluated by an academic institution.	Method examples and emerging scholarship; assess quality.
Conference paper	Research shared at a scholarly meeting; review varies.	New developments, preliminary findings, and emerging ideas.
Government/institutional report	Official statistics, research, or policy documentation.	Population data, trends, context, and policy evidence.

Three distinctions that matter

Peer reviewed describes a review process; **journal article** describes a publication format; **seminal** describes influence. A single work may fit all three.

Current does not always mean better. Recent empirical research helps establish the present evidence base, while older seminal sources can explain a theory's origins.

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Credibility is source-specific. Verify authorship, journal review policies, methods, citations, possible conflicts of interest, corrections, and retractions.

Questions to ask before citing

Is this source relevant to my research question? Is its evidence transparent and appropriate? Does it support a claim, provide context, or reveal a gap? Does my university permit this source type for the assignment?

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