

Sources of Evidence

We live in an increasingly information-rich world, where, possibly for the first time in history, the primary difficulties facing anyone conducting research relate to having too much readily available information rather than too little. As a result, the core research skill for the debater is often evaluating rather than locating evidence. However, before addressing some tests to apply to any type of evidence, it is worth considering how some common types might be approached.

You can find evidence in various places, among them: books, classes, the Internet, journals, newspapers, magazines, TV, think tanks, lectures—both on and offline—government data, and academic centers. Each of these sources of evidence has strengths and weaknesses in researching for a debate because each has different goals; for example, some emphasize analysis and background, some focus on currency and the flow of changing events. Thus, each will play a different role in your research strategy. Ultimately, you will determine what approach works best for you, but the odds are against the idea that the first five sites Google spits out will be exactly the pieces of evidence you need to support your case.

As you begin your research, keep two points clearly in mind:

1. A debater cannot read too widely. Debaters need to read a variety of materials, preferably from different bodies of knowledge and from different perspectives. Remember, if you find a useful piece of evidence in one source, check it in another.
2. You're going to use this information, not just hoard it. Thus, your research should be the basis for your arguments rather justification for a conclusion that you've already reached.

For the most part, you'll be researching broad topics long in advance of knowing the motion or having any idea of your position in the debate, so you're looking for information and ideas that underpin the principal discussions in given areas.

NEWSPAPERS (PRINT AND ONLINE) AND NEWS SHOWS

Professional news gatherers, primarily journalists, specialize in providing up-to-date information. That's their role, they're very good at it, and debaters should use these sources to find the most current information on a topic. Reputable news sources try to provide objective coverage of events; however, they do bring their own editorial bias in terms of what is ultimately included and—much more frequently—what isn't in their papers or programs. If you're not convinced that different news organizations can cover the same story in different ways, select any major domestic news event and then look at how the