

to major universities, foundations, governments, and publishers, their opinions are likely to be of more use to you as evidence. Be aware, though, that NGOs and think tanks can be supported by organizations with specific political or cultural agendas, so be sure to understand the group's motivations before using their evidence. Remember, your objective is to find information that your audience will accept as true. If they have heard of and trust a particular institution, any information you mention from that organization will carry more weight in their mind.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews with decision makers can be an excellent source of evidence; however, you should always have this question at the back of your mind: "Why is this person telling me this?" Wherever you see an interview, think about what the motivation of the interviewee is likely to be. If he benefits in some way from being believed, then take what he says with a grain of salt. In a news story about a labor dispute, for example, both parties have a clear financial interest, if not for themselves, then for those they represent. Ideally, you should select the parts of any interview that are uncontroversial. For instance, in the example above, both parties in a negotiation may agree on what needs to be resolved but disagree on the best resolution. You can, then, present the fact that they agree on something as evidence but should steer clear of presenting one outcome as such—unless you are happy to see it contested by the other side. At the very least, if you use information you know will be contested, you should do so with a knowledge of how you will respond when your opponent challenges it.

THE INTERNET

Virtually all of the sources listed already are available online, so why single out the Internet as a source in itself? For one very simple reason: no quality control. Many sources of information we find online encourage us to accept them because they're well-designed or popular rather than because they are grounded in reality. If I post online that "84% of Americans say they have had an encounter with an alien," it can achieve the appearance of truth long before someone can point out that it was just made up.

The Internet is the most powerful research tool ever invented, but you need to know how to use it. Before you use data that you find online, ask where it came from, what, if any, methodology underpins it, and whether the claims it makes are supported by the evidence it presents—just as you would for a speech in a debate. For the most part, sites that also have an offline presence with a real-world editorial process, for example respected