# What are Academic Sources? By Joanne Farmer [Video Transcript]

At university, it is likely that you will be asked to cite from academic sources in your work. What are they and what makes them different from other sources that you may encounter?

As the word implies, academic relates to education and higher learning, such as at a university. The term scholarly is also used in place of academic, particularly in the U.S or where the American-English language is used. Academic or scholarly sources therefore contain the results of research produced by academics or researchers within universities. These sources are considered to be more credible than popular sources such as magazines, newspapers and trade journals, which convey news, advertising, entertainment and general information to the public. So, whether it is an article published in an academic journal, a conference paper or a book published by one of the university presses, you will be expected to use academic sources for your studies at some point, particularly if you are a Masters or a higher degree student or are undertaking a literature review.

Academic sources tend to be favoured in higher education because of the rigorous peer review process the materials must go through before they are accepted for publication. Peer reviewed materials have been approved for publication by experts in the field, who ensure that facts are verified, political bias is reduced and quality is maintained overall. Academic sources enable scholars and academics a way of sharing their research and findings with others through online databases. This ultimately helps to move the world’s body of knowledge forward.

Wikipedia and the Web generally, can be helpful starting points to gain an understanding of concepts – but you have to be careful when using them. Your tutor may not be happy if you cite from Wikipedia in your work, because the information is unreliable – anyone can edit the content. Wikipedia itself is not an academic source; however, any references may be useful. It is easy to find information on the Internet but you can’t trust everything you read. For example, online forums may contain interesting discussion material. These are often just opinions from the general public, without any real authority. Always evaluate any material that you find to ensure that it is suitable for what you are doing.

There are a number of different tools that will help you identify suitable sources for your work. Google scholar searches the Internet for a range of academic sources but does not always lead you to the full text. NELSON is a key tool for the university. It will look for material that is in the library collections of journals and other sources. Not everything you find will be academic but there will be plenty of information to choose from. If you need further help identifying appropriate academic material, make an appointment with an Academic Librarian, via the library web pages.