

EVALUATING SOURCES RHETORICALLY

How you evaluate a source depends on the purpose of your research. Consider how the given source might inform your research and if it provides the most appropriate information for your purpose.

Purpose

- What is the intended purpose? (to inform, to argue, to persuade, etc.)
- What information or methods are used to achieve the intended purpose?
- Is the author successful in achieving their purpose? How (not)?

Audience

- For whom is the source intended?
- What is the purpose or scope of the publication in which the source appears?
- Is this a scholarly or popular source? A professional/trade journal?
- Is the language difficult to understand? (If so, you may wish first to gather more background information or sources written for a general audience.)

Relevance

- Is the content appropriate for your purpose?
- What does the source add to an understanding of your topic or argument?
- How does the source relate to other information you've found?
- How does the source relate to your ideas or argument?
- Is there a list of references? It may point you to other relevance sources.

Authorship

- What are the author's credentials or background in this area?
- Has this author written other things on this same topic?

Bias

Almost all sources have some degree of bias, but a well-reasoned argument considers multiple viewpoints.

- Is the information primarily fact or opinion?
- Does the author appear to have a strong bias, whether explicit or implied?
- Does the author present multiple sides of issues?
- Is the information supported by research?
- Has the author provided sufficient evidence?
- Does the author use highly-charged or emotional language?

Currency

Some research topics will require more up-to-date information than others. For example, scientific topics tend to require more current sources than to many humanities-focused topics.

- When was the source published?
- Do you need current information?

Writing Style

- Are ideas logically and clearly presented?
- Is the writing clear and grammatically correct?



ANALYZING RHETORICAL USE OF SOURCES: THE BEAM MODEL

When evaluating a source, consider its rhetorical purpose and function. The BEAM model of rhetorical source use describes four main ways sources are often used.

The BEAM Model

Background

General information or factual evidence used to provide context

Example: encyclopedia article, dictionary definition

Exhibits/Evidence

Materials a writer analyzes/interprets

Example: literary or artistic works, field observations, scientific specimens, contemporary reviews, historical documents

Argument sources

Materials whose claim a writer engages

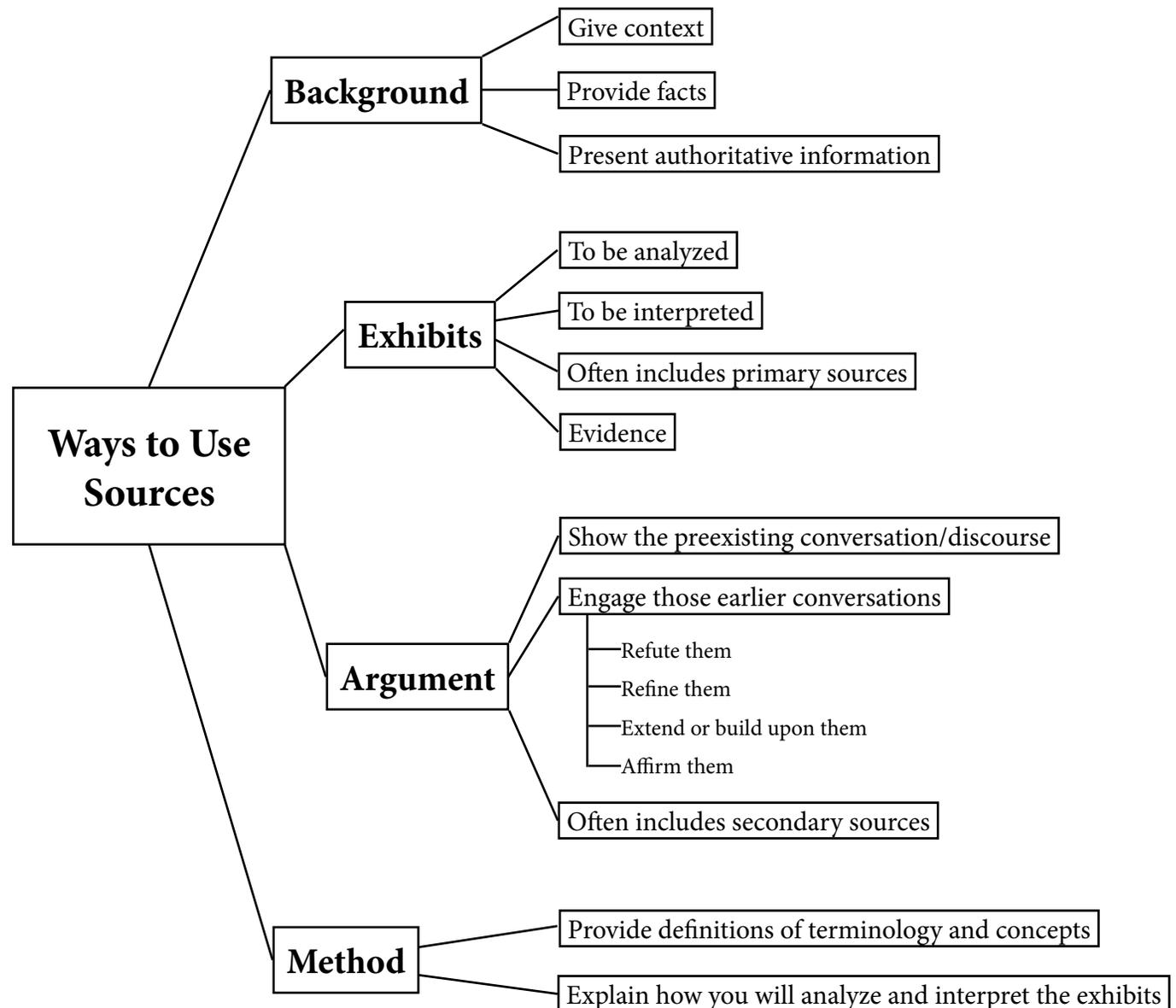
Example: scholarly articles, opinion pieces

Method/theory sources

Materials from which a writer adopts a concept or manner of working/thinking

Examples: references to theories/methods used by the author (e.g., feminism, New Historicism, direct observation, mixed methods)

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