



RESEARCH IN ORATORY: Source Evaluation

*This guide offers tips for evaluating research in **Original Oratory**. All of these concepts contribute to a well-researched oration and provide a foundation for students to create strong arguments and persuasive speeches. While this guide is by no means exhaustive, it should provide you with the tools necessary to make informed decisions about the research you include in your Oratory. This guide focuses primarily on methods of evaluation, types of sources, and some notes on how to begin and maintain the research process throughout the year.*

Date

Is the article published recently? There is no magic number when determining whether sources are recent and the information is current. A good rule of thumb is to make sure all *periodical articles* (e.g., newspapers, magazines, online publications) have been published within a calendar year of the tournament in which you will be competing. For sources like academic peer reviewed *journals or books*, there is more flexibility, but try and stay within the past two years. **Having sources that are current and topical help improve your credibility by showing the audience your topic is a problem we are faced with right now.**

Credibility

All of your sources should come from a reputable place. If you are unsure about the credibility of a source, ask yourself these questions: Who wrote this article? Is that person a trustworthy spokesperson for this topic? Where was this published? Is that source credible, fair, and rigorous when selecting works to publish? How well is this information presented? Does the site contain grammatical mistakes, bad formatting, or inaccurate information? The end goal is to make sure all of your sources could withstand scrutiny if a judge or audience member read through all of the sources you cite within the speech. Don't be afraid to be critical! The more rigorous you are when evaluating sources during the writing process, the better your speech will be!

Primary/Secondary

A *primary source* is evidence presented by an author or speaker with intimate knowledge of the content. So, the psychologist publishing the findings of a recent experiment of theirs is a primary source. The interview with a survivor of a recent natural disaster is also a primary source, since they have first-hand experience and are credible based upon that. Conversely, a *secondary source* is information that is gathered from primary sources. To continue the example from above, the newspaper reporting on the findings of a psychological study is a secondary source because they did not conduct the experiment themselves. **Both types of sources have merit, and you will likely use both in your speech.** However, if the opportunity presents itself to track down a primary source, it would benefit you to find it. As opposed to settling for a write-up from a big national newspaper on a recent opinion poll, find the organization that did the poll and look at the results in greater depth. In this way, you can use the source to greater effect in your own speech.

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Hard Evidence

This type of source provides an immediate and tangible result. A Presidential election poll is an example of *hard evidence* because the claims are backed up with data. This type of evidence is necessary when you are making claims in your speech that need tangible support. If, for instance, you are arguing that your problem is affecting a large number of people, the most effective way to support that is with a statistic.

Anecdotes

In contrast, an *anecdotal source* focuses on a narrative to convey an argument. A memoir is often a series of anecdotes or stories that help explain a person's life in the confines of a book. Anecdotes are a necessary and important component of Oratory! **They are often used to make your arguments relatable.** The audience may not be able to remember exact figures or statistics, but they will likely remember the story you told.

Pathos/Logos/Ethos

Each of these terms refer to **different types of arguments**, which are defined in greater detail below. You may encounter a source that uses all three to great effect; however, you will often find sources that focus on one or two aspects, rather than all three. Finding a balance among these three types of arguments will enable you to appeal to a larger audience. Inevitably, some people who listen to your speech will be affected most by strong argumentation, while others may prefer arguments based upon emotion. In order to appeal to both parties at the same time, focus on crafting a speech that employs both.

Pathos is in reference to arguments based upon **emotion**. If you find a source that is a narrative of a refugee, for example, that source is centered around pathos. The author relies upon appealing to the audience's emotion to persuade. Typically, these sources are strongest when used at parts of your speech where the audience is likely to be most affected. For instance, including a powerful anecdote toward the end of your second point is a great strategy to make the audience want to listen to solutions. If you can prove that your topic has a real emotional impact on people, that will lead to an interest in solving the problem you are discussing to prevent further emotional harm.

Logos is an argument based upon **logical appeals**. Sources centered around statistical probability, or in-depth argumentation, employ the use of logos. This type of argument is necessary in your oration as it establishes credibility in unique ways. Having a source that describes the scope of your problem (e.g., how many people this affects) is a fantastic way to establish significance. In that spirit, a logos-focused source is often included in the introduction during what is called a significance statement. Demonstrating the size and scope of the problem induces a sense of urgency to your speech, compelling the audience to listen.

Ethos is an appeal rooted in the **credibility of the author**. A lawyer who publishes work on a recent judicial decision has the ethos necessary to make those arguments. That same lawyer blogging about the local restaurant scene is inherently less credible. In the context of Oratory, try to find sources that contribute to your own personal ethos. If you are speaking on a topic that focuses primarily on a cultural phenomenon, find sources created by individuals who are credible within that realm. Finally, writing a speech that is well-researched increases your own ethos, because you are demonstrating you have done the work necessary to present credible ideas.

Beginning Research

There are two basic approaches to research in Oratory, both of which are completely valid and worthwhile; it's just a matter of personal preference.

Some students prefer to decide on a topic, begin outlining, and search for sources that support their claims. **This style of research focuses on finding sources that accomplish very specific goals within a speech.** If you know you need a piece of hard evidence in your first main point, that narrows the parameters of your search. When employing this style,

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remember to remain flexible. If you want to make an argument, but can not find sources to support it, be willing to adapt to a new argument.

The other style predominantly used puts research ahead of the topic. Instead of researching with a set goal in mind and searching for specific pieces of a puzzle, **this style relies upon casting a wide net and accumulating as much research as you can find.** For example, if you are interested in technology but don't have a specific topic in mind, begin searching for as much information as you can find. Along the way, when you read a very interesting article on a specific subject, narrow the search to see what others are saying about that topic. As you continue to narrow down your interest into something specific enough that it can be covered in 10 minutes, you have a potential Oratory topic!

As a general note, **keep track of all of your research throughout the year.** Even if a source doesn't make it into the first draft of your speech, that doesn't mean you won't include it by the end of the year. Having one place to find all of that information is immensely helpful. The simplest method is to create a *Word* or *Google document* with links to sources found online and notes to help you track down paper sources.

Research Throughout the Year

Your speech will evolve throughout the year, and your research should evolve with it. **Create a schedule with realistic expectations for updating research.** If you set a goal of reviewing your research a couple of times a semester, it's easy to maintain a well-researched Oratory. When evaluating, pay attention to the direction of your arguments. For example, if you are switching up the argument in a main point, examine your old sources to see if they still fit the new argument. Look at the publication dates. The article you found over the summer may not be current anymore, so try to replace it with something newer.

To make things easier, set up *Google Alerts* to trigger throughout the year. Pay attention to the search terms that have given you the most results, and sign up to be emailed the top articles about that subject every month. This will make it easier to update sources when you need to, since some of the research will already have been done for you!

Examples of Potential Sources

The following list of sources may serve as a reference point for beginning orators. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it guaranteed that everything on these sites is credible. Some are known for being biased toward one political party, as an example. Others are databases that have a subscription fee for users, so check to see what your school or local library offers. As an Association member, don't forget you can log in to access the online database, *HeinOnline*. As a guide, the following sources are generally credible, interesting, and thought-provoking.

- *Al Jazeera*
- *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*
- *The Atlantic*
- *The Boston Globe*
- *Businessweek*
- *CNN*
- *Der Spiegel*
- *EbscoHost*
- *Fox News*
- *Fusion*
- *Gallup*
- *Grantland*
- *The Guardian*
- *Harpers*
- *HeinOnline*
- *LexisNexis*
- *The Los Angeles Times*
- *MSNBC*
- *National Public Radio*
- *The New Yorker*
- *New York Review of Books*
- *The New York Times*
- *The New York Times Magazine*
- *Pew Research Center*
- *Politico*
- *ProPublica*
- *Psychology Today*
- *Ted Talks*
- *Texas Monthly*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *The Washington Post*
- *Wired*

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