Know Your Sources
Before you dive in and start searching, it’s important to take some time to think about what you’re looking for. Many types of sources are available, and each is unique in the kind of information it provides.

One helpful thing to consider before you start looking for your sources is the **information timeline**. The **information timeline** helps you see how information evolves into different types of sources as time passes, and how information gets used as it is published.
Let’s say an event such as the devastating 2010 Haitian earthquake occurs.
Source Types: Websites

**Web Sources**

As the event unfolds, social media such as twitter and Facebook tell you about it moment to moment. Go to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites to learn about events as they happen.

Other websites such as online news sites update very quickly and can also tell you about events as they occur. Information in web pages is easy to update and you will notice changes as an event unfolds.

- Social media sites (Facebook, Twitter)
- Blogs
- News Websites: CNN, ABC News
- YouTube
Newspapers

The day or days after an event, news media such as print newspapers and broadcast television report on the event. Newspapers are a daily chronicle of information from around the world, and a newspaper in one location might report something differently than in another. Editorials and op-eds in newspapers provide viewpoints that are good for constructing or supporting an argument.

Historical research makes great use of newspapers as well. Many older issues of newspapers are available in library databases.
Magazines

In the week or weeks after the event, magazines will cover the event with more depth and analysis. Magazines, published weekly or monthly, contain journalistic reporting with a bit more depth than newspapers. Magazines often have a specific focus, like music, sports, or economics.

WSU Libraries give you access to over 50,000 magazine and journal titles, including:

• Time
• Newsweek
• Vanity Fair
• Popular Science
and many more!
A few months after an event, scholars begin to publish original research related to the event. These articles will be published in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals. Scholarly articles, written for other scholars, have a disciplinary focus, such as Political Science, History, or Engineering.

Most journal articles are available free of charge via WSU Libraries databases and interlibrary loan.
Essentially, *peer review* is an academic term for **quality control**. Each article published in a peer-reviewed journal was closely examined by a panel of reviewers who are experts on the article's topic (that is, the author's professional peers...hence the term peer review). The reviewers look for proper use of research methods, significance of the paper's contribution to the existing literature, and integration of previous authors' work on the topic in any discussion (including citations). Papers published in these journals are expert-approved and the most authoritative sources of information for college-level research papers.

- Peer-reviewed articles are found in scholarly journals but not all journal content is peer-reviewed
- written and reviewed by scholars and subject experts
- usually dedicated to a specific discipline, like medicine, history, women’s studies, etc.
- use advanced vocabulary of field of study
- often present original research
- longer articles, often 10-15 pages or more
- articles include a list of sources at the end (Works Cited, References, Sources, or Bibliography)
Source Types: Books

**Books**

About a year after the event, sometimes sooner, information on the event will be written, edited, and published as books. Print and electronic books provide depth that other sources may not. Books are excellent sources for historical perspective on a topic, and often, book chapters are focused on one element of a topic and can stand alone as a source. So you don’t necessarily have to read the whole book if you’re using it as a source.

You can locate books using the WSU Libraries Online Catalog.
Other specialized books such as encyclopedias will be printed or updated with information about the event a year or more afterwards. Encyclopedias often have a subject focus, and can be found through WSU Libraries Online Catalog. These sources are great for factual, background information on a topic, and are a good place to start your research.

Reference sources can be general like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or the *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, or specific like the *Encyclopedia of Jazz*. It should be noted that with fully online reference sources like Wikipedia, events no longer take a year or more to appear.
Know Your Sources

So think about the **information timeline** and how information evolves as you plan your research. Different sources are good for different **types of information**. Now that you know about the information timeline and different types of sources, you can search for sources that are best for your topic and your assignment. What kind of information do you need? In which source type can you find it? Before you start searching, make a list of the types of sources you think you need.

And if you still need help, **Ask A Librarian**!

http://libresources.wichita.edu/askalibrarian