



Graduate Online Writing Studio

Evaluating Online Sources

Online sources can be difficult to assess for credibility. As you conduct your research, consider the following issues: bias, relevance, site domain, publication date, etc.

Some general rules of thumb:

1. Avoid nameless blogs, disreputable websites, dated articles, and articles with authorial bias.
2. Use .org, .edu, and .gov sites, peer reviewed journal articles, academic textbooks, and primary sources.

Example:

Imagine you are writing an essay about the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Your paper examines how effective the GRE is in assessing academic aptitude in prospective students.

As you research, you may come across a variety of sources.

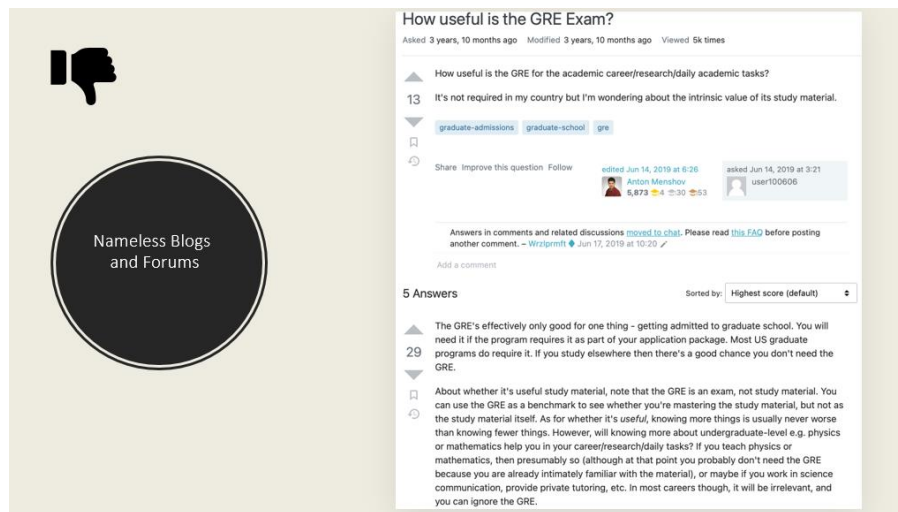
Be wary of these types of sources:

1. Disreputable Websites



Disreputable websites are usually commercial sites (.com) that are not well-recognized. These sites are not reviewed by experts and may likely be based on opinion rather than reliable sources. If you find citations throughout their article, you may follow the source to check the data and use that source instead if it is more reputable.

2. Nameless Blogs and Forums



The image shows a screenshot of a Quora question titled "How useful is the GRE Exam?". The question was asked 3 years, 10 months ago and has 13 answers. The top answer, by Anton Menshov, states: "It's not required in my country but I'm wondering about the intrinsic value of its study material." Below the question, there are 5 answers. The first answer states: "The GRE's effectively only good for one thing - getting admitted to graduate school. You will need it if the program requires it as part of your application package. Most US graduate programs do require it. If you study elsewhere then there's a good chance you don't need the GRE." The second answer discusses whether it's useful study material, noting that the GRE is an exam, not study material, and can be used as a benchmark to see if you're mastering the study material.

Nameless blogs and forums are sites such as tumblr, reddit, or quora with open format posts and question-and-answer formats. Many of these sites, even if they are created by established experts in the field, publish opinions without citations.

3. Dated Articles



The image shows a screenshot of a Springer article titled "Gre Candidates' Perceptions of the Importance of Graduate Admission Factors". The author(s) are Donald E. Powers and James Lehman. The source is *Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1983), pp. 231-249. The article was published by Springer. The stable URL is <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40195564>. The article was accessed on 27-10-2021 04:40 UTC. The JSTOR logo is visible at the top right of the article content.

Note: In general, try to find sources that have been published in the last five years. To find a peer-reviewed article, search for sources by using a database filter.

You may find a source that seems otherwise reputable, but the publication date is over five years old. Be wary of older sources, as they run the risk of communicating outdated methods, sources, and theories.

4. Articles with Authorial Bias

Articles with Authorial Bias

If You're Not Using GRE[®] Analytical Writing, You Might Be Missing Out

The Analytical Writing section requires test takers to complete two writing tasks — one that analyzes an issue and one that analyzes an argument. The tasks measure test takers' ability to:

- articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively
- examine claims and accompanying evidence
- support ideas with relevant reasons and examples
- sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion
- control the elements of standard written English

Note: While the ETS company (Educational Testing Site) uses a .org site, the organization makes a profit from the GRE by selling and administering the official test and preparation materials.

Even if you find a reputable source, always consider the stance of the author. In this example, the article seems credible because it is published on the ETS website, an organization with an established reputation, and it has a .org domain. However, the ETS profits from the GRE, and the title “If You’re Not Using GRE Analytical Writing, You Might be Missing Out” suggests that they may have an ulterior motive in promoting the GRE. Critically consider each source for authorial bias and if you find bias, while you may still decide to use it in your paper, be sure to acknowledge and be wary of bias.

Look for these types of sources, but still be wary of authorial bias and publication dates:

1. Peer-Reviewed Articles

Peer-Reviewed Articles

PLOS ONE

OPEN ACCESS PEER-REVIEWED
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Limitations of the GRE in Predicting Success in Biomedical Graduate School

Liane Moneta-Koehler, Abigail M. Brown, Kimberly A. Petrie, Brent J. Evans, Roger Chalkley

Published: January 11, 2017 • <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0166742>

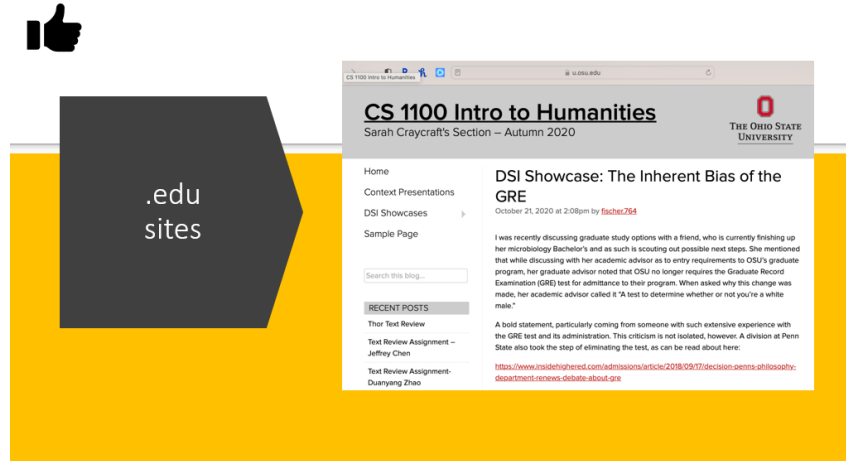
Article	Authors	Metrics	Comments	Media Coverage

Abstract

Historically, admissions committees for biomedical Ph.D. programs have heavily weighed GRE scores when considering applications for admission. The predictive validity of GRE scores on graduate student success is unclear, and there have been no recent investigations specifically on the relationship between general GRE scores and graduate student success in biomedical research. Data from Vanderbilt University Medical School's biomedical umbrella program were used to test to what extent GRE scores can predict outcomes in graduate school training when controlling for other admissions information. Overall, the GRE did not prove useful in predicting who will graduate with a Ph.D., pass the qualifying exam, have a shorter time to defense, deliver more conference presentations, publish more first author papers, or obtain an individual grant or fellowship. GRE scores were found to be moderate predictors of first semester grades, and weak to moderate predictors of graduate GPA and some elements of a faculty evaluation. These findings suggest admissions committees of biomedical doctoral programs should consider minimizing their reliance on GRE scores to predict the important measures of progress in the program and student productivity.

Peer-reviewed articles are reliable sources because they have been reviewed and verified by experts in the field.

2. .Edu, .org, .gov, or other non-commercial sites.



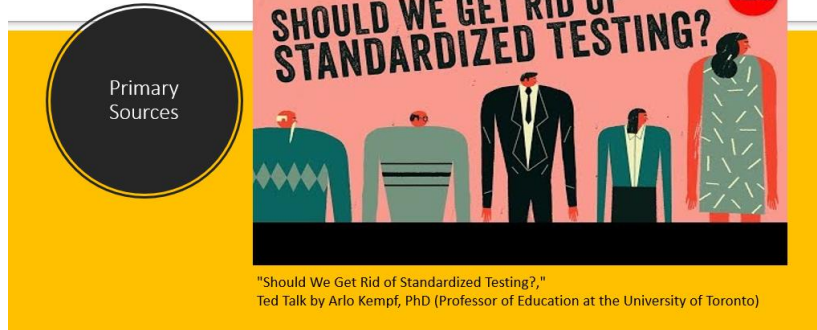
Sites with domains like .edu, .org, .gov are usually more credible because they are tied to reputable organizations.

3. Academic Books



Academic books are usually reliable sources because they have been written by experts in the field and, since they are academically published, their sources have been verified for credibility.

4. Primary Sources



Primary sources, like speeches from experts in the field, can also be credible sources.