## Alternative Sources

In this reading I want you to consider that there are various sources of information that could support your topic, that you may not have discovered or, f you did discover, thought valid for a college research project. We have talked all quarter about how important it is to carefully evaluate your sources. However, while applying stringent evaluation criteria, you also need to find and use minority viewpoints or alternative formats that don't always appear in the mainstream library databases. Of course you must consider multiple viewpoints; but, you must also consider diverse formats of information and what they can do for you. How might a blog give you different information than an encyclopedia? How would information presented in a format other than print enhance the quality of your presentation? Is the minority viewpoint making it into mainstream publications?

The print and online resources we are exploring provide information on nearly any topic, but a careful researcher should keep in mind the possible gaps in information that might result from searching mainstream sources. Some useful information sources, related to your topic, are not available through library catalogs, periodical databases or Web search engines. These might include government documents, alternative press periodicals, organizations and individuals.

In order to understand this better, review the information cycle from the beginning of the course. Are there any perspectives or kinds of information that are left out of this cycle? The cycle includes information published through normal publishing channels like books and magazines.

Think for a moment, like a detective, of circumstances under which the production of useful information might occur. In particular, consider who might produce information on your topic and why they are generating new material.

As you look for information, consider who might collect information on your subject area and what format they might use to store that information.

#### **Government Documents**

City, county, state, federal and international agencies create and collect information of all kinds, from statistical data to technical reports to informative pamphlets. These days, much of this information is available on the Web. However, general search engines will not always reveal these resources. In some cases, you will have to go directly to the agency website and search within that site. Take a look at the [Government Publications](http://libguides.seattlecentral.edu/Government) research guide at Seattle Central Community College for examples of the kinds of government sources available.

#### **Alternative Press Periodicals & Databases**

Periodical databases, such as *Academic Search Complete* and *ProQuest Research Library*, are the tools of choice for identifying articles in magazines and newspapers. These databases, and others like them, cover the most common and well-known periodicals. They include only a few articles from the "alternative press" - that is periodicals with a smaller readership, and that may represent different points of view.

Such periodicals might be important if you are interested in exploring a wide variety of perspectives on a topic, or if your research involves a topic that is not often discussed in mainstream sources or by well-known groups. For example, the journals in ProQuest most likely do not offer strong coverage of topics in alternative medicine. However, alternative or smaller publications may publish more articles on that topic.

*Ethinic Newswatch, also published by ProQuest,* is a collection of full-text articles from the ethnic, minority and native press, presenting alternative viewpoints on cultural studies, social issues, and history.

#### **Blogs**

Many independent writers and journalists are using blogs to communicate with their readership. You may have come across some of these when you searched the Web for your topic. Use blogs very carefully. Make sure that the author has good credentials to write on his/her topic.

Alternative information formats are also important to consider. Non print sources, such as television, radio, films, maps, are another source of information that might be missed by standard research tools. So much of the information we encounter is generated in these forms that it is worth considering them as resources. To locate films and videos via library catalogs, use title, author or subject searches. Many websites for TV and radio stations are making audio and visual programs accessible. YouTube, Flickr, and many other sources are good for finding educational films and images.

#### **Organizations & Individuals**

Sometimes the best source of information is an expert. Organizations, whether they be professional, international, social service, educational or commercial, have a lot of expertise and information. Some organizations have specialized libraries that may be willing to help you find what you're looking for. They will also have websites containing lots of other information that you can use.

Organizations are also useful for identifying individuals with expertise in your subject area. These individuals can be an information source themselves, or they can offer recommendations for further research. Look for their contact information under links such as "About Us" or "Contact Us" on related Websites.

Perhaps there is a professor at your college who has expertise in your area of interest. Try looking at your college directory to by academic discipline or department to find descriptions of the faculty and contact information.

If you contact an organization or individual, it is a good idea to be well prepared. Do all the research you can on your own first, and have a set of questions you are trying to answer. Don't expect them to do your research for you.