

J202

Culver

Tip Sheet: Information Sources

Week 5

Media: Past news coverage can provide useful information, but be sure you don't duplicate past mistakes or seek the same old sources.

- Lexis-Nexis — complete text of hundreds of newspapers, along with TV transcripts and legal opinions (Available through www.library.wisc.edu)
- news.google.com — headlines and search engine indexing media content posted to Web
- news organization Web sites — many news organizations have search engines on their sites
- microfilm — older material may be stored at library or historical society; periodical indexes are available for some larger publications

Libraries: In addition to past media content, other resources are valuable.

- reference materials — world almanacs, specialized dictionaries, directories, advertising information and other resources offer quick answers
- journals — academic articles can provide story ideas and the names of expert sources
- librarians — some reference librarians will help find answers to tough questions
- historical documents — historical societies house large collections documenting history of individuals, region, nation (depending on copyright, potential source of art as well)

Government documents: Open records laws offer reams of material.

- police and court records — who was arrested, sued, divorced or wronged, and what happened to the case; dockets can help plan future content as well
- property records — ownership history, tax values and other information on locations that might be in the news
- census data — a wealth of demographic information at www.census.gov
- legislative records — new and existing laws as well as the debate in generating them

- other records — with few exceptions, things like memos, reports, minutes and communications are public record; you might have to file a formal request to get them

Events: Scheduled gatherings provide opportunities for observation and sources of information.

- government meetings — take notes, ask questions during breaks, get story ideas and follow stories
- protests and rallies — interview participants, police and bystanders, listen to speeches and observe behavior
- speeches — get good quotes, listen for story ideas beyond the speech itself

People: Interviews provide quotes and information.

- officials — contact people mentioned in press releases or who speak at meetings, as well as those who draft policies
- experts — often think tanks and universities will list those who know a lot about topics; for example, experts.news.wisc.edu indexes knowledgeable people at the UW
- “the person on the street” — quotes from bystanders and “average” people

Other online resources: the Web can quickly provide other useful sources of information

- “press” pages — many companies and organizations have pages set up for the media with press releases and other resources; for example, UW's university communications page: www.uc.wisc.edu
- Google for information on a topic; just be sure you find more than one source and the pages you use are reliable
- for trustworthy sites, visit ipl.org, a librarians' index of the Internet