

How to Use Open-Source Research Responsibly

A practical method for using publicly available information lawfully, ethically and proportionately.





What is open-source research?

Open-source research uses information that is lawfully accessible to the public.



For professional discussion and reflection • Illustrative, not exhaustive • Apply alongside appropriate organisational risk, evidence and decision-making processes



Define the research purpose

A clear purpose prevents unnecessary or unfocused information collection



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Set legal and ethical boundaries

Responsible research begins with clear limits on what may be accessed and used.





Apply necessity and proportionality

Collect only the information necessary for the defined purpose.



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Protect personal information

Publicly available personal information should still be handled carefully.



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Evaluate the source

Open-source information should be assessed before it is treated as evidence.

SOURCE ASSESSMENT

Who produced it?

When was it published?

What expertise supports it?

What is its purpose?

Is the original source available?

Check before relying

Look for editing, manipulation or omission

Source profile
Global Aviation Watch

Publication date
12 Mar 2024

Author credentials
Aviation security analyst
10+ years experience

Original source
<https://www.globalaviationwatch.org/news/airport-security-update>

Purpose
Inform and raise awareness



Preserve the original context

Information can lose meaning when it is removed from its original context.





Separate observation from inference

Responsible research distinguishes what can be seen from what is being assumed.



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Corroborate independently

One public source rarely provides enough evidence on its own.





Recognise bias and manipulation

Open sources may be incomplete, selective, misleading or deliberately manipulated.



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Handle sensitive findings carefully

Research findings can create security, privacy or reputational risks if shared carelessly.



Use need-to-know
access

Consider harm
from publication

Restrict or redact
sensitive detail

Share through
secure channels

Escalate when
necessary



Maintain an audit trail

A clear research record allows another person to understand and review the work



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The responsible research checklist

Responsible open-source research is about collecting only what is necessary, understanding it carefully and using it appropriately.



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