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Evaluating Information: A Guide for Academic and Everyday Use

Introduction
In a world where information is produced and shared more rapidly than ever, the ability to critically evaluate what you read, watch, or hear has become essential; not just for academic success, but for informed citizenship, digital well-being, and lifelong learning.

The **CRAAP Test** is a widely used tool for assessing the quality of information sources. Originally developed by librarians at California State University, Chico, CRAAP is an acronym for five key evaluation criteria:

Currency – When was the information produced?
Relevance – Does the content meet your specific needs?
Authority – Who is responsible for the information?
Accuracy – Is the content reliable and correct?
Purpose – Why was this information created?

Whether you're writing a research paper, preparing a sermon, exploring theological questions, or checking facts on social media, the CRAAP test equips you to make informed decisions about the information you choose to use and share.

Currency: *Is the information up to date?*
Currency refers to the timeliness of the information. Depending on your topic, more recent sources may be required to ensure accuracy and relevance.

Consider:
- When was the information published or last updated?
- Is there newer research available on the topic?
- For your subject area, does it matter how old the information is? Ex. psychology vs history.

Example: A 2010 study on mental health apps is likely outdated in a field that evolves rapidly.

Relevance: *Is the information appropriate for your needs?*
Relevance considers how well the source fits your research question or information need.

Consider:
- Does the information relate directly to your topic or question?

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- Is it written at an appropriate level? Ex. not too basic or too advanced
- Who is the intended audience – scholars, professionals, the general public?
- Is the source helping you understand or strengthen your argument?
- Are you choosing the source just because it supports your opinion?

Example: A general article from a wellness blog might be easy to read, but a peer-reviewed journal article on CBT interventions in university students would be more relevant to an academic research paper.

Authority: *Who is responsible for the content?*
Authority refers to the credibility and qualifications of the source's author or publisher.

Consider:
- Who is the author, creator, or organization?
- What are their credentials, academic background, or professional expertise?
- Is the author affiliated with a reputable institution?
- Is there contact information or a biography available?
- Has the author published in other respected sources on the same topic?

Example: An article written by a clinical psychologist affiliated with a university carries more authority than a social media post by an influencer with no relevant credentials.

Accuracy: *Is the information reliable and supported by evidence?*
Accuracy addresses the truthfulness and 'correctness' of the content.

Consider:
- Are the claims supported by evidence, references, or citations?
- Are the sources cited by/within the information reliable and scholarly?
- Can the information be verified in other reputable sources?
- Is the language objective?
- Are there spelling, grammar, or factual errors?

Tip: Even professional-looking websites can publish misleading or unverified content. Always cross-check facts using trusted sources such as academic databases or institutional websites. A simple way to judge a website's credibility is through its domain suffix in the URL. Common domain suffixes are:
- .com or .ca – usually for commercial use
- .org – frequently used by organizations
- .gov – usually used by government
- .edu – frequently used by learning institutions, like a college or university

Example: A research article that cites peer-reviewed studies and provides a full reference list is generally more accurate than a personal blog that lacks sourcing.

Purpose: *Why was the information created?*

Purpose refers to the reason the information exists, whether to inform, sell, entertain, persuade, or provoke.

Consider:

- What is the goal of the source? To inform or educate? To sell a product? To promote a particular belief?
- Is the content balanced, or does it show clear bias?
- Are multiple perspectives presented?
- Are there advertisements or commercial interests influencing the content?
- Does the author or publisher have a stated or hidden agenda?

Example: A non-profit research institute may publish an unbiased report on social trends, while a corporate-sponsored article may subtly promote products or services under the guise of "information."

Putting It All Together: Sample Evaluation

Two sample sources evaluated using the CRAAP framework.

Source: Peer-reviewed article from a psychology journal published in 2021 on mental health in post-secondary students.

Evaluation:

- **Currency:** Recent (2021)
- **Relevance:** Focused on your research topic
- **Authority:** Written by academic researchers
- **Accuracy:** References and data included
- **Purpose:** Informative, scholarly

Conclusion: **Use this source in academic work!**

Source: A blog post titled "Why Mental Health is Just a Trend," posted anonymously in 2010.

Evaluation:

- **Currency:** Outdated (2010)
- **Relevance:** Related but superficial
- **Authority:** No author or credentials provided
- **Accuracy:** No sources cited
- **Purpose:** Persuasive, possibly biased

Conclusion: **Avoid using this source for academic work!**

Final Thoughts

Evaluating information is a core academic skill, but it's also part of being a thoughtful and informed participant in today's media-saturated world. Whether you're writing a research paper or reading the news, using the CRAAP test helps you engage with information more critically and confidently.

If you have questions about evaluating a source or need help navigating research tools, contact ABC's Library: library@abccampus.ca. We're here to support your success!

Appendix 1: Further Reading

The below resources provide excellent additional guidance on evaluating information and applying the CRAAP test in academic and everyday contexts.

California State University, Chico. (n.d.). *Evaluating information – Applying the CRAAP Test*. Meriam Library. Retrieved from https://library.csuchico.edu/sites/default/files/craap-test.pdf

Douglas College Library. (n.d.). *Evaluating information*. Douglas College Research Guides. Retrieved from https://guides.douglascollege.ca/c.php?g=737134&p=5310558

Fleming College Library. (n.d.). *Basic evaluating sources*. Fleming College Library. Retrieved from https://library.flemingcollege.ca/help/BasicEvaluatingSources

Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). (n.d.). *Evaluating sources of information*. Purdue University. Retrieved from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/evaluating_sources_of_information/general_guidelines.html

Seminole State College Library. (n.d.). *Evaluate information: Research foundations*. Seminole State College Research Guides. Retrieved from https://libguides.seminolestate.edu/researchfoundations/evaluateinformation

University of North Texas Libraries. (n.d.). *Media literacy and fact-checking*. UNT Libraries. Retrieved from https://guides.library.unt.edu/medialiteracy/fact-checking

Appendix 2: In-Depth CRAAP Questions

Consider the following questions when evaluating a source using the CRAAP test. Not all will apply to every source, but they can guide your critical thinking.

Currency

- When was the information published or last updated?
- Are the references current?
- Does newer research exist on the topic?
- Has the topic changed significantly over time?

Relevance

- Does the source help you answer your research question?
- Is the content detailed enough for academic use?
- Is it pitched at the right audience?
- Would this source contribute meaningfully to your argument?
- Are you relying on it just because it confirms your opinion?

Authority

- Who is the author, editor, or publisher?
- What qualifications or expertise do they have?
- What institution or organization are they affiliated with?
- Can you find more about them online or in academic databases?
- Has the work been peer-reviewed?

Accuracy

- Are claims supported by facts, data, or scholarly references?
- Are the arguments logical and coherent?
- Are there spelling or grammar errors?
- Is the information consistent with what you've found in other credible sources?

Purpose

- Is the intent to inform, educate, persuade, entertain, or sell?
- Is the tone objective or emotional?
- Are opposing viewpoints represented fairly?
- Is the author affiliated with a group that might influence content?
- Does advertising or sponsorship influence the message?

CARSS GUIDE TO EVALUATING INFORMATION QUALITY

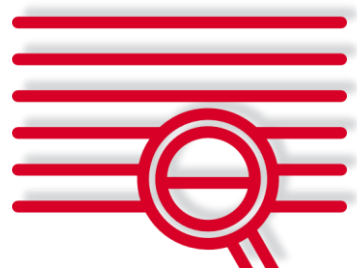
CREDIBILITY	ACCURACY	REASONABLENESS	SUPPORT	SUITABILITY
Is this source believable and trustworthy?	**Is the information correct and current?**	**Is the information fair and objective?**	**Is the information verifiable?**	**Does the information meet your specific needs?**
Author's credentials, education, employer; memberships; contact info	Timely OR timeless; how quickly the field changes	Balanced, reasoned argument; evidence for all sides	Sources cited Bibliography, further readings, etc.	Check Table of Contents for topics covered
Quality control Peer review process; Corporate authorization "official website"	Comprehensive; detailed	Calm tone that doesn't inflame emotions and cloud judgment	What *kind* of sources were used?	Tone, language and level of detail
Summaries or abstracts	Factual	Objective, unbiased, free from conflict of interest	Corroboration , fact-checking and triangulation	Presumed background knowledge
Critical reviews	Audience & purpose	Moderateness: how likely, possible, or probable are the claims based on your knowledge of the world	External consistency – compare what familiar in new source with what is familiar in other sources	Assignment criteria
Warning Signals Spelling and grammatical errors; anonymous; poor reviews	**Warning Signals** Undated; out-dated, or auto-dated; vague; sweeping generalizations	**Warning Signals** One-sided; over-the-top language; improbable claims; conflict of interest	**Warning Signals** Numbers/statistics not credited; no other sources confirm facts/statements	**Warning Signals** Too many new terms
GOAL: a source that supplies good evidence that you can trust	**GOAL: a source that is correct today and that gives the whole truth**	**GOAL: a source that engages the subject thoughtfully and reasonably**	**GOAL: a source that provides convincing evidence for its claims and uses verifiable data**	**GOAL: a source that you can understand and that meets the specifications of your project**

Source: Harris, R. (2010, November 22). Evaluating Internet research sources. Retrieved from http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?

CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?

SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.

CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.

IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.

CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

IFLA
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
With thanks to www.FactCheck.org