How to Evaluate Information Sources

Evaluating the quality, validity and usefulness of the information you find, whether in print format or in electronic format, is the most important step when doing research.

Remember: traditional print sources usually go through an extensive publication process that includes editing and article review; for many internet sources however, there is no central authority that reviews and verifies the content of web pages. *It is up to you to decide what info is good!*

The *CRAAP* Test is a list of questions that can help you evaluate the information you find.

Currency: *the timeliness of the information*

- When was the information published or posted?
- Has the information been revised or updated?
- Is the information current or out-of date for your topic?
- For web sources, are the links functional?

Relevance: *the importance of the information for your needs*

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?
- Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?
- Would you be comfortable using this source for a research paper?

Authority: *the source of the information*

- Who is the author / publisher / source / sponsor?
- What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?
- What are the author's qualifications to write on the topic?
- Is there contact information, such as a publisher or e-mail address?
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? Examples: .com .gov .org .net .edu

Accuracy: *the reliability, truthfulness and correctness of the content*

- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed by others?
- Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
- Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion?
- Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors?

Purpose: *the reason the information exists*

- What is the purpose of the information? Is it to inform? teach? sell? entertain? persuade?
- Do the authors / sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
- Is the information fact? Is it opinion? propaganda?
- Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?