First-Year Seminar Tutorial

Evaluate Your Sources

Practicing C.R.A.P. Detection
Evaluating sources is an important step in the research process. This tutorial explains criteria you should use to evaluate sources, whether they are websites, library books and materials, or articles from library databases.
Evaluating Sources

Use the acronym CRAP to remember the criteria you will use to evaluate your sources. The letters represent:

- **C**urrency
- **R**eliability and Relevance
- **A**uthority and Audience
- **P**urpose and Point of View
Currency

C

- Current events in the news
- Changing technology
- Literary movements
- Topics in history

Step 1. To evaluate a source for currency, look for the publication date. If you are researching a current news topic, such as an upcoming election, or recent event, timeliness is important. If you are researching a subject such as a literary movement or history, a source that is 70 or more years old may be just as useful as a source published last year.
This book’s record in the library catalog shows the publication date after the name of the publisher. Based on the subject and date, is this book still considered current? This book’s publication date is 2013 – it may be out-of-date in terms of digital technology. However, it is about human coping strategies relating to digital technology, so it may have timely information regardless of the specific technologies.
Relevance

• Does the source contain the information you need?
• Terminology should relate to the focus of your research

Step 2. When evaluating a source for relevance, look for terminology that reflects the focus of your research. Determine if the source contains the information you need.
For example, using this book’s record, look for subject headings that describe the item’s focus. A table of contents, summary, or abstract of the item might be available to read.
Step 3. Look for signs of the item’s reliability. Are any references listed? If your source is a website, are any links provided? What are the links? Where do they lead? Additionally, consider whether or not the source has a specific bias or slant of opinion. Opinions are helpful if you want to construct a persuasive argument. When you are looking for hard facts, on the other hand, locate sources that are informative rather than persuasive.
This article has numerous links throughout its contents. It also ends with references for additional sources. Consequently, this is considered a reliable source.
Step 4. Determine the authority responsible for the source. Look for evidence that the author or organization is a trustworthy expert on the topic. Often you can find this information within the publication itself.
Let’s say that you’ve located an article by Deborah Tannen. If you conduct a quick search on the internet, you will see that she is a professor at Georgetown University who has written many books and articles about language and communication.
If you are using a website, look at the site’s domain extension to draw conclusions about the authority of the source. Websites with .edu domains are tied to academic institutions. United States government websites have a .gov domain. Others to consider are .org for nonprofit organizations that may have a specific opinion or agenda, .com for commercial organizations such as Amazon.com, and .net, which may be a personal or local community website.
Step 5. No matter what type of source you are using, it is important to consider the target audience. Is the information presented for the general public, for college students, or for professionals in a specific trade or research field? Or, is it for an entirely different audience?
This particular website has sections for educators, students, and kids.
Purpose and Point of View

- Why was the page put on the web? To inform? To sell? To persuade?
- What is the goal of the author / organization?
- Are there advertisements present on the site?

Step 6. Consideration of the author’s purpose and point of view is also important in evaluating a source. What is the author’s or organization’s goal in publishing the information? Is the goal to present facts, sell a product, or persuade an audience? Additionally, consider whether advertisements detract from the content.
Is this site’s purpose merely to inform or to sell products?
Evaluating Resources

Use the acronym CRAP to remember the criteria you will use to evaluate your sources. The letters represent:

- **Currency**
- **Reliability and Relevance**
- **Authority and Audience**, and
- **Purpose and Point of View**.
Questions?

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