Evaluating Sources

If you want to succeed at your assignments or research, you should only use quality information, whether it’s found in books, journal articles, or websites.

Use the following criteria also known as the CRAAP test to critically evaluate any source of information.

**Currency.** When was the information published, updated and/or revised? Is the information out-of-date for the topic?

**Relevance or intended audience.** How much information is presented? Does it provide a superficial treatment or a detailed analysis? Is the information related and relevant to your topic? Is the readership level appropriate, neither too simple nor too sophisticated?

**Authority.** Not all books or journal articles in an academic library are scholarly. Who are the authors and/or editors and what are their credentials? For journals, are articles peer-reviewed? That is, do they have the approval of other experts in the field? For books, are they published by scholarly presses, popular presses, or self-published?

**Accuracy and verifiability.** Does the source match your understanding of the topic? Can you verify the claims in other sources? Never rely on just one source. Is there a bibliography or list of works cited? What types of sources and how many relevant sources are cited? This is an indication of the depth of the author’s knowledge.

**Purpose and objectivity.** Is the purpose stated? Is the subject approached from an objective standpoint? If not, what is the author’s bias and how might it influence the information presented? Be wary. There may be more than one perspective on any given issue.

Using these criteria—currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose—to critically evaluate sources of information will help ensure that you’re only using quality sources of information. If you need more help with evaluating sources, visit one of our research help desks.