



Evaluating Sources

Scholarly Articles, Books, Newspapers, and
News Journals

Basic Principles: CRAAP Test

- **Currency**
 - The timeliness (publication date, revision history) of the information.
- **Relevance**
 - The importance of the information for your needs.
- **Authority**
 - The source (author, publisher, sponsor) of the information.
- **Accuracy**
 - The reliability (source, evidence, truthfulness) of the information.
- **Purpose**
 - The reason (teach, sell, entertain) the information exists.

(Adapted from a [guide](#) published by California State University's Meriam Library.)

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Gut Test

When considering whether a particular website is a good source do not forget the simple Gut Test. There is no fancy acronym here. The gut test is just your immediate first impression after skimming a site's homepage or reading some selected content.

If on your first viewing a site seems...

biased or advocating a particular agenda,

factually wrong or treating opinion as fact,

full of spelling or grammatical errors,

kooky, warped, crazy, sick, depraved, or just plain old wrong

...then it is probably not a reliable source of research information.

Using 'Bad' Information

Biased, opinionated or even false information can be included in a research project to effectively highlight dissenting opinions or identify commonly held errors. The reliability of such information, however, should always be clearly identified and placed in context with more balanced sources.



Currency

- 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- Is the information current or out-of date for your topic?



Relevance

- 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

- Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
- Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?
- 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?



Accuracy

- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- 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

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

Scholarly Articles and Books

- Articles are written by experts
 - Often include reports of original research
 - May be "peer-reviewed" or "refereed," meaning the articles have gone through a critical selection process by scholars in the field
 - Often include an introductory abstract
 - Include citations and bibliographies
 - Considered primary source material if presenting results from the author's original research
- (<http://www.lib.umb.edu/node/1512>)
- Distinguish between
 - Primary research (monograph),
 - Secondary (no original research and refers only to Monographs and other book sources)
 - Biography
 - Government report
 - Check Book reviews
 - Book Review Digest
 - Canadian Book Review Annual
 - CHOICE
 - Book Reviews in Journals and Newspapers
- (<http://www.mta.ca/library/govt&politics/chap4/chap4-evaluating/chap4--eva-books.html>)



Newspapers and News Journals

- Written by journalists who often consult with experts
- Coverage of current events, current-interest issues and activities, often broad in treatment, and easy to read
- Usually includes advertising, illustration, and may be attractive and entertaining
- Do not usually provide references (i.e. a bibliography)
- Can be a source of useful background information, particularly when there is little other information on a topic available elsewhere
- Not scholarly
- Most news oriented magazines and newspapers try to present unbiased information. If you are looking for opinions, you may want research periodicals that express particular points of view.

(<http://www.lib.umb.edu/node/1514>)

- Major examples: Maclean's, Vancouver Sun, Winnipeg Free Press, National Post, Glob and Mail, Ottawa Citizen, La Press
- Example of a Newspaper article critique:
http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/researchroom/evaluate/magazine_index.asp



Opinion Journals

- ❑ Fall between popular and scholarly periodicals
- ❑ Intended for the educated reader, but not necessarily the scholar
- ❑ Opinions or viewpoints on cultural or political affairs, usually with particular bias
- ❑ Good for comparing points of view. Look at a review of the same book in competing journals.

(<http://www.lib.umb.edu/node/1515>)