**Evaluating Information Tutorial**

**Objectives:**

In this tutorial you will learn:

* Why you should evaluate your information sources
* How the CRAAP Test can help you remember what to look for
* 5 simple criteria you can use to evaluate any source

**Why evaluate?**

Why you should evaluate your information sources-

* Information Overload

We are constantly bombarded with information

Email, Radio, TV, Social Media, the Internet, Friends, School Readings, Professors

* Filtering Information

One of the most important things that we can learn to do for schoolwork and life is to filter for the best information – in other words, **reliable information**.

But how do you determine if a source is **reliable**?

The CRAAP Test

Luckily, some lovely librarians at CSU (California State University) Chico created The CRAAP Test to help you determine whether information is… well… CRAP or not!

**The CRAAP Test**

Introducing CRAAP

CRAAP is an acronym that stands for…

* C = Currency
* R = Relevance
* A = Authority
* A = Accuracy
* P = Purpose

Why we need the CRAAP test-

Anyone can post on the Internet!

* Your brother
* The guy at the bus stop
* Politicians
* 13 year-olds

Why you should evaluate the CRAAP out of your sources?

The CRAAP test is an effective way to evaluate all types of information, but it is especially important to evaluate information that you find on the Internet. Here is an explanation of what each letter means:

**Currency**

How **current** is the information?

If these cars were sources, which would you use?

* Old and Abandoned Car – This source was perfectly appropriate once upon a time. But now it’s so old it no longer runs. It’s rusty and abandoned and totally out of date. Don’t use old, outdated information. Find something that still runs.
* Classic and Well Maintained Car – This source may have been written many years ago, but it’s still considered to be a core work on the subject. You will encounter sources like this more often in the humanities and social sciences than in medicine and the sciences where it is crucial to consider the current research. If in doubt about an older source, ask your professor or a librarian for guidance.
* Shiny and New Car – Current research and information is usually best. For example, if you’re researching a controversial issue, you should consider the debate that is playing out right now. In the sciences, new practices and innovations are being introduced all the time. Current information could make the difference between life and death.

Currency – Questions to Ask?

When was the source (website, article, book, etc.) published?

* Books – Have the date information on the back of the Title Page.
* Internet Articles – and websites usually post the date information just after the article title or at the bottom of the webpage.

Do you need ‘up-to-date’ info? Does your topic require recent sources?

* If you are writing about **iPads** or **heart surgery techniques**, you are going to need very new, up-to-date information.
* If you are writing about **Abraham Lincoln** it might be okay to have information that is older, such as a book or an article written 10 or even 40 years ago.

**Relevance**

Does this source really fit into your argument?

Party Crashing Sources

Have you ever thrown a party and suddenly wondered, “Who are all of those people? Who invited them?” The same thing happens with sources. Your searches will often turn up sources that just aren’t right.

Relevance – What Questions to Ask?

* Does your source fit it?
* Does your source really relate to your topic and help you support your argument?

This may seem obvious, but sometimes when you are in a hurry to find information, you find articles that sort of relate to your topic, but don’t truly help you to make your argument. Take the time to find information that helps you make the point you want to make. Your argument will be stronger!

Is your paper on **juicing** fruit and veggies or on “**juicing**” with steroids?

Is the information at the appropriate level?

Make sure that the information source is neither too basic nor too advanced for the audience. For example, don’t use as author biography from an online bookstore for your English paper!

**Authority**

Who wrote or published your source? What are their credentials?

Which of these authors would you trust?

* Alexander – This is Dr. Alexander Lee. Dr. Lee is an Associate Professor and public policy researcher at Harvard Kennedy School of Government. He has a PhD in political science from Columbia University, publishes his research in academic journals, and presents papers at conferences around the world.
* Todd – This is Todd. Todd has a blog. He writes about his feelings on politics, video games, and his cat, Noodles. Todd’s only real expertise is his cat, Noodles.
* Elise – This is Elise. Elise is a technology blogger. She works in the industry, tests new products first hand, live-blogs tech events, and attends all major conferences. She writes for a respected insider technology website.
* Kevin – This is Kevin. Kevin is a conspiracy theorist. He has self-published eleven books, which you can order from the PayPal link on his website. They have many typos.

I hope you would choose Todd!

Authority – Questions to Ask?

* Who authored/created the information?
* Who is the Author, publisher, or creator of the article, website, or book?

For **articles** and **books**, it is usually pretty easy to find the name of the author. However, **Internet articles** often do not have authors listed, in which case the creator of the website is considered to be the author of the article. Many websites list authors at the bottom of the home page.

* What are the author’s credentials? Is he/she qualified to write on this topic?
* Since anyone can post anything on the Internet, you need to make sure that the author has the expertise to know what he/she is talking about. Try Googling the author. What can you learn about their qualifications? What other works have they written? No Name = No Credentials = No Way!

**Accuracy**

How does your source hold up? Is there enough support?

Accurate, reliable sources are usually backed by:

Support, Evidence, and Research

Example-

You must choose a bridge to cross a river:

* Lars recommends a narrow wood and rope foot bridge. You know that Lars likes shortcuts. Lars says this bridge should hold up fine. But who is Lars, anyway? Would you rather cross a river on a strong bridge made of Iron and concrete or the one that Lars recommended?

Accuracy – Questions to Ask

* Is there any support?
* Is the information supported by evidence or outside sources?

If you come across an information source that does not cite where the author got the facts, be skeptical.

Example-

“A survey conducted in 2009 by CareerBuilder.com found the use of social media sites by employers to screen job candidates had doubled from the previous year.27 The Society for Human Resource Management conducted a survey of more than 500 of its member in October 2011 and concluded that 18% of employers who recruited job candidates used social network searches as a screening tool for these candidates.28…

27 Sommers*,* Meredith. *“Employers Differ On Checking Online; ACLU Rips Use by State Police”*, Washington Times, 4 Apr. 2012, p. A16.

28 Kadaba, Lini S. “What is Privacy? As Job-Seekers Are Judged by Their Tweets and Facebook Posts, Uncertainty Abounds,*” Philadelphia Inquirer,* 2 May 2012. http://articles.philly.com/2012-05-03/news/31539376\_1\_facebook-photos-facebook-passwords-employers.

Notice how this author **cites evidence** and **uses footnotes** to show where she found the information.

This quote was cited from:

Hidy, Kathleen McGarvey, and Mary Sheila E. McDonald. “Risky Business: The Legal Implications of Social Media's Increasing Role in Employment Decisions.” *Journal of Legal Studies in Business,* vol. 18, 2013, pp. 69-107.

* Does the information seem correct based on your personal knowledge?

Trust your gut. If a source just seems wrong, be skeptical and consider another source for your research. The Internet is full of false claims, hoax websites, and satire.

Example- “New Study Finds 85% if Americans Don’t Know All The Dance Moves To National Anthem” from the Onion.

The Onion is a satirical newspaper that publishes outlandish, fake news stories. Yet many people fall for their headlines day after day!

**Purpose**

Why was your source written?

Here are a few common reasons information is published

* Sell – Infomercials
* Inform – Reporter on the news, Researcher in a study
* Persuade – Activist, Debater/Speechmaker

Purpose – Questions to Ask

* Why was your source written?
* What is the purpose of the source?

Information that is seeking to sell you something or persuade you is more likely to discuss the positive aspects of a product or point of view. For a more balanced view, seek out sources that were created to inform.

* Does the information express a bias toward a particular view?

Information of all purposes can be used. In fact, sometimes information that presents a bias or preference for a certain point of view can be useful when you are creating an argument. However, if you are writing an informative paper, it is a good idea to acknowledge any bias you find in your source, so that your teacher knows that you recognize the expressed bias.

Example- Environmental Issues – Who says? How would information published by **Oil Companies** differ from statements by environmental advocacy groups like the **Sierra Club** or the federal **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**?

**Practice Evaluating Sources**

Try This: Use it or Lose it?

You’ve found 6 sources for your paper on “Teen Cellphone Use.” Which ones should you use? Use the CRAAP Test to help you decide.

* **A Book** called *Wireless Personal Communication* from 1993.
  + **No! This source is not current enough for your topic!**
* **An Article** containing current statistics about texting while driving.
  + **Yes! This article is relevant to your topic!**
* **A Quote** from a website saying that 110% of high school students use cell phones.
  + **No! This quote is not accurate!**
* **A Report** on smartphone usage on the Techcrunch website.
  + **Yes! This report is relevant to your topic!**
* **A Blog Entry** about smartphones by someone with the username Android4Eva.
  + **No! The author does not have any credentials to show expertise!**
* **An Editorial** by a MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) mother that texting while driving is as dangerous as drinking and driving.
  + **Yes! MADD is a trusted source for statistics about drunk driving!**

Try This – CRAAP Spotting

Now let’s use the CRAAP Test to evaluate a webpage. You have found an online article about allergies for your research paper, but you need to determine if this is a credible source. Here are 5 problems you may encounter with the webpage:

* Advertisement to shop at Fragrance Farm, which sells allergy safe fragrances
  + There are huge ads for an online fragrance store and their allergy-safe products. The **Purpose** of this site is to sell you perfume! This site will have biased information
* Author is “By Your Guide”
  + We don’t know who wrote this article or whether they have any expertise. This source has no **Authority**.
* Article states, “Studies show that over 98% of the general population suffer from one form of allergic reaction or another.”
  + Watch out for vague references to “studies” without any other details. What studies? Plus the details don’t sound right. 98% of the population? Really? This gets a low score for **Accuracy**.
* Copyright for webpage from FragranceFarm, Inc. in 2005
  + This site is almost 10 years old **(Currency).** Plus this site is owned by Fragrance Farm! Are they trying to sell you something? **(Purpose)**
* AllergyFacts and Topics provide links to Fragrances for Her and to FragranceFarm
  + Why are there so many links to Fragrance Farm? Or to various products? You should question the **Purpose** of this site!

Recap

In this tutorial you have learned:

Why it is always important to evaluate information sources

How the CRAAP Test can help you identify credible sources

How you can evaluate any source by considering: Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose

**Quiz**

Evaluating Information:

The following quiz consists of 10 multiple choice questions each worth 10 points. Type the correct answer in the blank provided.

\_\_\_\_ 1. The acronym CRAAP, used to help evaluate information stands for:

1. Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose
2. Curriculum, Relevance, Analysis, Aptitude, Proprietary
3. Critique, Review, Analyze, Appreciate, Paraphrase
4. Content, Recentness, Applicability, Academic Honesty, Persuade

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. When you find information on the internet that relates to your topic, you should: (Select **ALL** that Apply)

1. Be grateful you were able to find something useful so quickly
2. Be certain to capture a screenshot of the site to show your instructor
3. Be skeptical of the information you find
4. Apply the CRAAP Test

\_\_\_\_ 3. As you write a paper for your Health Science course, you notice one your web sources covers all of the beneficial aspects of a drug you are researching, and lists no side effects. This may lead you to think:

1. This could be the miracle drug the market has been hoping for!
2. The website might be outdated.
3. The website could be biased, and trying to sell you something.
4. You should explore the website for information on other drugs.

\_\_\_\_ 4, By applying the “Authority” test for evaluating information, you can investigate whether:

1. You have the proper authorization to use a source in your paper.
2. The author of your source is considered to be an expert in the area about which you are researching.
3. The author of your source is wanted by the authorities.
4. Your source compares favorably with sources used by other students in your class.

\_\_\_\_ 5. According to the CRAAP Test, Currency refers to:

1. The cost of the book of article
2. When the book, article, or website was published
3. The intended audience
4. The reliability of the source

\_\_\_\_ 6. If you can’t tell what author or organization published a webpage you’d like to use you should:

1. File a take-down notice under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act
2. Look for a more authoritative, credible source
3. Assume that the author must know what he/she is talking about
4. Paraphrase the information, but not cite it

\_\_\_\_ 7. Using the CRAAP method to evaluate which of the following sources would **NOT** be appropriate for a research paper?

1. An electronic book about Jefferson accessed via the ACC catalog.
2. An article on Jefferson by a “Contributing Author” on About.com.
3. A website article on Jefferson accessed through WhiteHouse.gov.
4. A book from the public library about Thomas Jefferson and John Adams.

\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following is a question you should ask yourself to help determine if a source is **relevant**?

1. Does the source appear in your top 3 search results?
2. Does the source really relate to your topic?
3. Does the information seem correct?
4. When was the source published?

\_\_\_\_ 9. An article by an anonymous author:

1. has been written for entertainment purposes
2. may have less authority because you can’t tell if the author has any qualifications
3. does not have to be cited in your bibliography
4. is probably biased

\_\_\_\_ 10. Which of the following is an indicator that a source is more likely to be accurate?

1. Advertisements
2. Opinions
3. Popularity
4. Citations

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Answer Key

1. A
2. C, D
3. C
4. B
5. B
6. B
7. B
8. B
9. B

10.D