

Evaluating References

APSU Writing Center Handout

The C.R.A.A.P. Test

When conducting research for academic papers, it's crucial to assess the credibility and reliability of your sources. The C.R.A.A.P. Test provides a systematic way to evaluate sources based on Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose.

Currency

Currency refers to the timeliness of the information. Academic research often requires up-to-date sources, especially in fast-evolving fields like science and technology.

- When was the source published or last updated?
- Has newer research disproved or updated this information?
- Does your topic require recent data (e.g., medical studies, current events), or is older research still valid?

Example:

A 2023 journal article on climate change is likely more reliable than a 1995 article due to advancements in climate science.

Relevance

Relevance measures how well the source supports your research question and thesis.

- Is the source used as evidence for your argument or as a counterargument?
- How does the source directly relate to your thesis?

- Is the source scholarly, and does it meet the depth of analysis required for academic research?

Example:

A peer-reviewed medical study on vaccine efficacy is more relevant to a research paper on public health than a personal blog post about vaccines.

Authority

Authority evaluates the credibility of the author and the publication.

- Who is the author? Are they an expert in the field?
- Does the source list an author, or is it anonymous?
- What is the publisher's reputation?
- What is the website domain suffix?
 - .com = Commercial intent
 - .edu = Educational institution (often reliable)
 - .org = Non-profit organization (may have a bias)
 - .gov = Government-run (often authoritative)

Example:

A research paper written by a professor at Harvard University is more authoritative than a random Wikipedia entry.

Accuracy

Accuracy refers to the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content.

- Is the source a primary source (original study, experiment) or secondary source (analysis of primary sources)?
- Has the information been peer-reviewed?
- Do other reliable sources agree with the information?
- Does the source contain errors, unsupported claims, or biases?

Example:

A peer-reviewed article from the New England Journal of Medicine is more accurate than an opinion piece on a medical blog.

Purpose

Purpose examines why the source was created and whether it has any biases.

- What is the goal of the source? To inform, teach, persuade, or entertain?
- Does the author have an ulterior motive (e.g., financial gain, political agenda)?
- Does the language seem objective and fact-based, or does it contain emotional appeal?

Example:

A scientific study published in a medical journal has the purpose of informing, whereas a pharmaceutical company's website promoting its own drug may have persuasive intent.

Always cross-check multiple sources and consult your professor or librarian if you're unsure about a source's reliability.

References

George, N. (2016, May 20). *Evaluating references using the C.R.A.A.P. test*. University of Nevada Reno Writing and Speaking Center. <https://www.unr.edu/writing-speaking-center/writing-speaking-resources/evaluating-references-using-the-craap-test>

Mackaben, K. (2024, April 25). *Evaluating Sources: The CRAAP Test*. Benedictine University Library. <https://researchguides.ben.edu/source-evaluation>