Evaluating Sources

Why do we need to evaluate the information we read?

We do this for a number of reasons. Not all information is reliable or true, and not all of it will be suitable for your project. Print and internet sources may vary widely in their authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency and coverage. Evaluating what you are reading is a good skill to have for school, and for use in your daily life.

One tool to help you evaluate resources is called CRAAP. CRAAP is an acronym that will help you remember what you should be looking for in your resources: Currency, Relevancy, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose.

Currency: When was the information last updated?

Relevancy: Is it actually related to your topic? Does it help answer your research questions?

Authority: Who is writing it and why should we listen to them?

Accuracy: Is it true, and how do we know it's true? (Check for citations and references!)

Purpose: Who is writing it and why? Who is paying for this to be written?

What to evaluate

We need to evaluate the document we will be using, and if it's an online document, we need to evaluate the website that is hosting the material. Anyone can publish a website, and internet resources don't always have editors who can fact check. There are no standards to ensure accuracy of the information posted online, so you need to use your own knowledge and critical analysis skills to decide whether you can trust the site.

Here's some questions to ask when:

Evaluating the website:

- Who is the organization or person sponsoring this site?
- When was the page created or modified? Is it up-to-date?
- Is it well produced, with correct spelling, grammar and sentence construction?
- Does it offer active links to other serious web sites?
- Does it refer to other documents or sources to support its statements or point of view? Are those sources authoritative?
- **TIP:** Look at the website name and website endings. Is it government, a business, an organization? Here's a few common ones: .ca (geographic, Canada), .gc.ca (government – Canada), .org (organization), .com (commercial), .edu (educational institution – U.S.A.), .gov (government – U.S.A.), .net (network service providers), nt.ca (government – NT)
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Evaluating the document:

• Does it have an abstract/summary?
• Does it have references?
• Does it talk about how the authors are qualified? Their credentials?
• How many authors are there?
• How long is the article?
• What is the title of the article?
• What is the title of the publication?

Peer-reviewed vs. Grey material

For some research projects you will need to use peer-reviewed journals. But how do you know what is peer-reviewed and what is not? There are generally three types of information resources:

Newspapers and magazines: articles are written by reporters and generally quote experts in a field.

Journals with articles written by academics and/or professionals: Although the articles are written by experts, it may not be reviewed by a group of peers, and therefore may not be fully accurate or true.

Peer-reviewed or scholarly journals: these contain articles written by experts and are reviewed by other experts in the field before it is published. This ensures the quality of material being published. They will review the methods, conclusions, and quality of writing to ensure it meets the highest standard.

Here's some tips to help figure it out.

What is peer-reviewed:

• Published more frequently than books
• More accessible
• More finished than conference papers or working papers
• The place where new knowledge is first revealed
• Most current information on a topic
• Reviewed by experts in field to ensure article is presenting correct information
• Contain references

More cues to tell the difference:

From a citation:

Journal title: does it have bulletin, journal or review in the title?

Frequency of publication: Is it less frequent (monthly, quarterly, annually)?
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**Author of articles:** Are there multiple authors?

**Article length:** Is it longer?

**Article titles:** Is it telling you information in the title, or trying to sell you something?

**From the periodical/journal:**

**Quality of materials:** Is the paper thick or thin, shiny or flat? Are their more pictures than words? Are there graphs and charts?

**Advertising:** If there is advertising, it's not a journal

**Tone:** Is it conversational, or academic? Is it selling you something or sharing something? Does it use terms specific to the field of study?

**Audience:** Is it targeting a specific audience, or the more general population? Do you need to know about the topic beforehand?

**Purpose:** What is the purpose of the article? Are they selling something or sharing new information or discoveries?

**Availability:** Can you find it on the shelf in stores? It’s probably not peer-reviewed.

**From an article:**

**Abstract:** All peer-reviewed articles have an abstract

**References:** All peer-reviewed articles have references

**Author's credentials:** There is generally a description of the author's background in the subject being written about.

How to find peer-reviewed articles

Using the **Aurora College Library Catalog**

- Search using keywords
- Look at the citation:
  - Academic Journal icon
  - Volume/Issue
  - Database
  - DOI – Digital Object Identifier
  - Journal title (Bulletin, Journal, Review, etc.)
  - Multiple authors
- Limit using: source type (Academic Journals, Reviews)
- Show More: Scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals
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Remember! More Search Tips

REMEMBER:
- Use Keywords
- Use Boolean search terms: AND, OR, NOT
- Think of the board topics and related concepts

MOTIVATION gets better results. Enjoy your subject matter!
NOTICE which resources are cited in the paper. Look at the bibliography to read that paper and include it in your research.
EVALUATE your sources!