

Evaluating Sources: The CRAAP Test

When choosing sources to include in a research or argument paper, it is important to check their credibility and usefulness. The CRAAP Test provides an easy to remember strategy for deciding if a source will strengthen your paper or if it should be discarded. CRAAP stands for **currency**, **relevance**, **authority**, **accuracy**, and **purpose**.

Currency

Currency refers to the timeliness of a source.

Questions to Consider

- **What is the timeframe of my topic?** The types of sources you are able to find may depend on whether your topic is recent (covering events of the last week, month, or year), ongoing (covering events that took place in the past and continue into the present), or old (covering events from the past that are considered settled).
- **When was the source published?** Older sources that were once relevant may be debunked. Extremely recent sources may not yet be verified. Without a date, it is difficult to judge if a source is reliable.
- **What can an older source add?** While it is important to find recent sources, older sources can provide context or show how discussions of a topic have changed over time. Additionally, sources may remain relevant for different timespans in different fields of study. An article from the 80s may be acceptable in a humanities class but not in a science class.

Relevance

Relevance refers to how closely the source matches your topic and needs.

Questions to Consider

- **Does the source relate to my topic?** Titles can be deceiving. Read through all sources carefully to make sure they address the topic thoroughly.
- **Does the source answer any of my questions?** A source does not have to be directly about your topic. You can find sources that are relevant because they address a single aspect of the topic that you wanted to know more about.
- **Does the source add new information?** It is possible that a source relates to your topic, but it merely repeats ideas and insights that have been covered better in other sources you have collected.
- **Does the source change my way of thinking about the topic?** One of the most important reasons for doing research and finding sources is to gain new perspectives on your topic. These types of sources can add depth to your discussion or change the direction of your argument.

Authority

Authority refers to the credibility of a source.

Questions to Consider

- **Who is the author?** Check the source for information on the author. If it is not provided, do a quick search to find out the author's credentials, if they are qualified to write on the topic, and if they have any organizational affiliations that could change how they write about it.
- **Who published the source?** Research the publisher's submission criteria, mission statement and goals, area of focus, and intended audience. Articles written for experts tend to go through more rigorous peer review before publication.

- **Has the source been cited by other authors I know to be credible?** Check other sources that you have already validated and see if they cite the source. Do they agree with the source, or do they have some critiques?

Accuracy

Accuracy refers to the correctness, truthfulness, and reliability of a source.

Questions to Consider

- **How was the information collected?** Analyze the research methods the author(s) used to gather data and information. Research methods could include interviews, questionnaires, field studies, chemical analyses, archival work, literature reviews, etc. Check for potential flaws or biases in the author's approach.
- **What evidence is provided to support any findings/claims?** Use the CRAAP test on sources used to support the author's claims. Be wary of anecdotal or emotional evidence.
- **Can I verify the source's findings/claims?** Review other sources on your topic to see if they came to the same conclusions as the main source you are working with.

Purpose

Purpose refers to the motives for the creation of a source.

Questions to Consider

- **What type of media is the source?** Knowing what media you are looking at can help you determine the purpose of the source. Most writing is done to fulfill at least one of these purposes: share knowledge, inform, sell, entertain, persuade, etc. Be aware that some sources try to do many things at once.
- **Who is the intended audience?** The intended audience can affect how a source is written and what information is included. Sources meant for experts contain more field-specific jargon and follow accepted formatting and style guidelines. Sources meant for laypeople may simplify a topic and exclude important information. For example, an article on climate change found in a newspaper will not have the same depth or detail as an article in a scientific journal because most of the audience does not have the educational background needed to understand it. The audience's reasons for reading are also different. The newspaper audience reads to stay generally informed; the scientific journal audience may build their research on the findings of what they read.
- **Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?** Analyze the tone and language of the source to pinpoint any possible biases. Fact-based sources tend to use an objective tone and logical arguments. Opinions and propaganda tend to lean heavily on emotional appeals and personal experience. However, some authors adopt a false objectivity to seem more factual. For this reason, it is important to make sure you use the previous CRAAP criteria to evaluate all sources.