Evaluating online information: Use the CRAP test

All information found online should be critically evaluated because there is no guarantee that it is reliable or accurate.

Use this four-part test to determine the credibility of information you want to use. The “top indicators” in each section are a checklist for determining if online information is current, reliable, authoritative and biased.

Use this four-part test to determine the credibility of information you want to use:

Currency (Is the information up-to-date?)

• How recent is the information?
  o How recently has the website been updated?
• Is the website modified regularly?
  o Is the information current enough for your research?

Checklist for up-to-date information

• Site or page date
  o Is the date of publication or last revision published (often at the bottom of the page)?
  o When was the site or page last updated?
  o Is the information out-of-date?

Reliability (Is the information trustworthy?)

• Is this web page intended for elementary or high school students?
  o If so, is it the best site to refer to when writing a university-level research paper?
• Has the information passed through any peer reviewing process?
• Sources?
  o Has the author(s) documented his/her sources by including a reference list?
  o Is the information reproduced from another site. If so, which one?
  o If applicable, when were the sources published?

Checklist for reliable information

• Evidence of the peer review process (e.g., in an "About us" or editorial statement)
• A bibliography or reference list

Authority (Is the author credible?)

• Who is the creator or author of the website or web page
  o E.g., a recognized individual or organization/government?
• What are his/her/its credentials
  o E.g., is the individual author or organization known in the field?
• Has the author published other material(s)?
• Does the author provide contact information (e.g., email address or phone number) in case you want to verify the information?
• Who is the publisher or sponsor?
  o Can you determine if he/she/the organization has a good reputation?

Checklist for authoritative information

• Author's credentials
  o Look for information about the author of the site or page.
    ▪ Is the author qualified to publish on this topic?
      • E.g., Can you identify the author's education and relevant professional experience?
  o Look up the author's name the Carleton University Library catalogue or Wikipedia

• URL
  o Read the uniform resource locator (URL) carefully to determine if you are reading someone's personal page.
  o You need to investigate the author carefully because personal pages have no publisher or domain owner to vouch for the information.
• **Domain**
  o Is the domain extension appropriate for the content?
    ▪ Government sites: .gov
    ▪ Educational sites: edu.
    ▪ Nonprofit organizations: .org

• **Publisher**
  o Identify the publisher (individual or organization) of the site or page.
  o The publisher operates the server computer from which the site or page is issued. Do you know anything about the publisher?

• **"About us" links**
  o Read the information on the site or page about the author and/or publisher.
  o This could be under "about us," "philosophy," "background," or "bibliography" tabs.

• **Page design or structure**
  o Page design is not always an indicator of credibility but if a site or page is easy to navigate, you'll be able to assess the information more easily.

**Purpose/Point of view (Is the information objective?)**

• What is the purpose or point of view of the site?
  o Is the information primarily fact or opinion?
  o Does the point of view seem balanced and/or objective (e.g., presents more than one perspective)?

• What is the publisher's interest (if any) in this information?
  o Does the site try to persuade, advocate, entertain, or sell a product?
    ▪ Is there advertising on the site?

**Checklist for objective information**

• **"About us" links**
  o Read the information on the site or page about the author and/or publisher.
    ▪ This could be under "about us" or "philosophy", "background" or "bibliography" tabs.
  o Is there advertising?
• Cross reference information
  o Look up some of the references in Google Scholar (through the Carleton University Library).

Overall CRAP test checklist

Currency
• Site or page date
  o Is the date of publication or last revision published (often at the bottom of the page)?
  o How out-of-date is the information?

Reliability
• Evidence of the peer review process (e.g., in an "About us" or editorial statement)
• A bibliography or reference list

Authority
• URL
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  o You need to investigate the author carefully because personal pages have no publisher or domain owner to vouch for the information.
• Domain
  o Is the domain extension appropriate for the content?
    ▪ Government sites: .gov;
    ▪ Educational sites: edu.;
    ▪ Nonprofit organizations: .org.
• Publisher
  o Identify the publisher (individual or organization) of the site or page.
  o The publisher operates the server computer from which the site or page is issued. Do you know anything about the publisher?
• Author's credentials
  o Look for information about the author of the site or page.
  o Is the author qualified to publish on this topic?
    ▪ E.g, Can you identify the author’s education and relevant professional experience?
• Look up the author's name in Google, Wikipedia or the Carleton University Library catalogue.

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*The original CRAP test is courtesy of the University of Waterloo.*