

# CITATION

# Evaluating Sources

In order to figure out if the source you want to use is appropriate for an assignment, you can give it the **CRAAP Test**:

**Currency:** The timeliness of the information.

- ☐ When was the information published or posted?
- ☐ Is the information current or out-of-date for your topic?
- ☐ Are the links, if any, functional?

**Relevance:** The importance of the information for your needs.

- ☐ Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- ☐ Who is the intended audience?
- ☐ Is the information at an appropriate level for your needs? (not too elementary nor too advanced)

**Authority:** The source of the information.

- ☐ Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor? Look at the beginning or the end of the document to find the name of the author and/or the company or organization responsible for the information. You may have to click on links such as “About This Site” or “Home.”
- ☐ Is biographical information about the author available? If there is no author’s name, can you readily find information about the company or organization that owns the page?
- ☐ Is the author qualified to write about this topic? Is he or she affiliated with a university, institution, or group with a reputation for accuracy in the field? Does he or she have degrees, training, or experience in the field? What is its reputation?

**Accuracy:** The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the informational content.

- ☐ What is the source of the information?
- ☐ Are claims supported by evidence?
- ☐ Has the information been reviewed (or “refereed”) by other experts in that field?
- ☐ Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
- ☐ Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors?

**Purpose:** The reason the information exists, and how it is being presented.

- ☐ What is the purpose of the information (e.g., to teach, sell, entertain, or persuade)?
- ☐ Is the information based on fact or opinion?
- ☐ Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?

## Scholarly vs. Popular

A scholarly journal is generally one that is published by and for experts. In order to be published in a scholarly journal, an article must first go through the peer review process in which a group of widely acknowledged experts in a field reviews it for content, scholarly soundness and academic value. In most cases, articles in scholarly journals present new, previously unpublished research. Scholarly sources will almost always include:

- Bibliography and footnotes
- Author's name and academic credentials

As a general rule, scholarly journals are not printed on glossy paper, do not contain advertisements for popular consumer items and do not have colorful graphics and illustrations (there are, of course, exceptions).

Popular magazines range from highly respected publications such as *Scientific American* and *The Atlantic Monthly* to general interest news magazines like *Time* and *US News & World Report*. Articles in these publications tend to be written by staff writers or freelance journalists and are geared towards a general audience. Articles in popular magazines are more likely to be shorter than those in academic journals. While most magazines adhere to editorial standards, articles do not go through a peer review process and rarely contain bibliographic citations.

## Primary vs. Secondary Research

In determining the appropriateness of a resource, it may be helpful to determine whether it is primary research or secondary research.

Primary research presents original research methods or findings for the first time. Examples include:

- A journal article, book, or other publication that presents new findings and new theories, usually with the data
- A newspaper account written by a journalist who was present at the event he or she is describing is a primary source (an eye-witness, first-hand account), and may also be primary "research."

A secondary research does not present new research but rather provides a compilation or evaluation of previously presented material. Examples include:

- A scientific article summarizing research or data, such as in *Scientific American*
- An encyclopedia entry and entries in most other Reference books
- A textbook