

Evaluating Sources

Evaluating sources is an important step in the research process. This tutorial explains criteria you should use to evaluate sources, whether they are websites, library books, or articles from library databases. Use the acronym CRAP to remember the criteria you will use to evaluate sources. The letters represent Currency, Reliability and Relevance, Authority and Audience, and Purpose and Point of View.

Step 1. To evaluate a source for currency, look for the publication date. If you are researching a current news topic, such as an upcoming election issue, timeliness is important. If you are researching a subject such as a literary movement or history, a source that is 20 or more years old may be just as useful as a source published last year. This book's record in the library catalog shows the publication date after the name of the publisher. Based on the subject and date, is this book still considered current?

Step 2. When evaluating a source for relevance, look for terminology that reflects the focus of [writing a conclusion for a research paper](#). Determine if the source contains the information you need. For example, using the book's record, look for subject headings that describe the item's focus. A table of contents or summary of the item might be available to read.

Step 3. Look for signs of the item's reliability. Are any references listed? If your source is a website, are any links provided? What are the links? Additionally, consider whether or not the source has a specific bias or slant of opinion. Opinions are helpful if you want to construct a persuasive argument. When you are looking for hard facts, on the other hand, locate sources that are informative rather than persuasive. This article has numerous links throughout its contents. It also ends with references for additional sources.

Step 4. Determine the authority responsible for the source. Look for evidence that the author or organization is a credible expert on the topic. Often you can find this information within the publication itself. Let's say that you've located an article by Deborah Tannen. If you conduct a quick search, you will see that she is a professor at Georgetown University who has written many books and articles about language and communication. If you are using a website, look at the website's domain extension. Websites with .edu domains are tied to academic institutions. United States government websites have a .gov domain. Others to consider are .org for nonprofit organizations that may have a specific opinion or agenda, .com for commercial organizations such as Amazon.com, and .net, which may be a personal or local community website.

Step 5. No matter what type of source you are using, it is important to consider the target audience. Is the information presented for the general public, for college students, or for professionals in a specific trade or research field? Or, is it for an entirely different audience? This particular website has sections for kids and for teenagers.

Step 6. Consideration of the author's purpose and point of view is also important in evaluating a source. What is the author's or organization's goal in publishing the information? Is the goal to present facts, sell a product, or persuade an audience? Additionally, consider whether any ads present detract from the content. Is this site's purpose merely to inform or to sell a specific diet? For additional help on the CRAP test and evaluating sources, ask a librarian.