



How to evaluate sources

An important part of the research process is deciding which sources are reliable enough to be included in your work. Additionally, you will be required to compare different sources' strengths and limitations. Use the following tools to assist you in your evaluations.

Testing whether a source is reliable or not (CRAAP)

The CRAAP test is a well-known set of criteria that students can use to decide whether or not a source is appropriate to use in their academic work. Sources that 'fail' in a number of these criteria (especially authority and purpose) should be avoided. eBooks and journal articles on the Library Portal will consistently pass the CRAAP test, whereas other online sources should be used with caution.

C	Currency	- When was the source published? - Is the information still relevant or is it now outdated?
R	Relevance	- Is the information relevant to your assignment topic or field? - Will it help you answer the question?
A	Authority	- Who is the author? Are they reliable? - Was the source published by a reputable publisher?
A	Accuracy	- Can the information be cross-checked against other sources? - Does the source include citations and/or a reference list?
P	Purpose	- Why was this source created? - Is the source trying to educate/inform or is it trying to entertain/sell?

Evaluating the strengths and limitations of a source

As well as being able to evaluate a source's reliability, you will also need to show critical insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the sources you choose to use for your academic work – especially when you make use of journal articles and reports. To do this, you can ask several questions about a source, to help you consider it more critically. Some example questions are listed below.

Questions about evidence

- Does the author base the argument on evidence (citations)?
- Do they over-rely on a handful of sources to prove their case?
- Are the cited sources reliable and academic?

Questions about methods

- Does the study use the most appropriate methods? Would another method have been more effective?
- Is there evidence that the study was conducted in an ethical way?
- Did a different study use the same method and come to a different conclusion?

Questions about conclusions

- Do the conclusions flow from the results (have the results been interpreted correctly)?
- Has anything been overlooked?
- Are limitations of the study noted?

Some additional questions

- Was information missing or left out in the discussion of the research context, existing literature, or conclusions?
- Do similar studies provide stronger arguments or evidence?

This may seem like a long list of questions, but as you become more used to the research process, it will become second nature to question sources in this way.

If you have further questions or would like some help with source evaluation, get in touch with us at AcademicSkills@arden.ac.uk