

Evaluate Your Sources: Use a Rat TRAP



How can I tell the good information from the bad?



What do you look at when buying milk?

Why do we need to critically evaluate?

1. Keep out the "rats" (bad, inaccurate, or biased information)
2. Better research sources = better paper = better grades
3. Save time & effort: if it doesn't fit your needs, why use it?
4. Critical reading leads to creative output which leads to #2 above
5. Bias is everywhere, but can be identified with critical reading
6. Web: professional-looking sites can be produced cheaply & quickly by anyone
7. Evaluating information = lifelong skill; can be applied to all aspects of modern life
8. Accurate information = informed citizens = stronger democracy

4 Evaluation Factors (and questions to ask yourself)

Context is important. This is only one way to consider sources. How sources will be used can impact the importance of these factors. E.g., timeliness isn't as important for history topics, where primary sources from the time of the event can be more valuable than current sources.

Timeliness (*when?*)

- ☐ Does the topic you are researching require current data?
- ☐ When was the information authored/created or last updated?

Reliability (*how?*)

- ☐ Are the author's sources documented? Research methods revealed?

Authority (*who?*)

- ☐ Author credentials available? (try Googling author or organization)
- ☐ Is the author qualified to write on the topic?

Purpose (*why?*)

- ☐ Is there a discernible bias or agenda? Misinformation or propaganda?
- ☐ More information on identifying purpose / bias: <http://tinyurl.com/idpurpose>