The CRRAAB Test – a framework for evaluating sources

	Guiding questions	Evaluation notes on your source
C **Currency**	Is the information **up-to-date** *enough*? Think about the speed the situation is developing – in a slow-moving field, a source several years old might be acceptable, but in a rapidly unfolding situation, days or even hours might make a big difference.	
R **Relevance**	It doesn't matter how true the information is, it has to be relevant to your **research question**. Keep reminding yourself: what exactly is my question? What level of **detail** and **precision** do I need?	
R **Reputation**	What does the **person** or their **organisation** *lose* if they are found out to be wrong? Academics and journalists could lose the **respect** of their students, readers, and colleagues – or even be sued or lose their jobs. Organisations may lose customers or funding, and find they are taken less seriously in the future. These things give people **incentives** to get things right. On the other hand, little-known bloggers or people who post anonymously on social media are unlikely to face consequences from posting **misinformation**. So try to use "reputable" sources.	
A **Authority**	If someone *is an authority on* a subject or *has authority to speak on* a subject it means they have earned the right to be taken seriously – either by being an **expert**, or by being a **direct observer** or **participant** in the matter. An ocean scientist should have university degrees and **affiliation** [connection] to a reputable organisation (e.g. a university) to show their **qualification** to speak about ocean ecosystems. However, a humble fisherman can speak with authority about **local** changes in fishing conditions from his deep **experience** of his own fishing grounds. Direct personal experience is hard to share, but ideally, an expert does not ask you to take things on their authority alone. Especially in academic writing, they **cite their sources** – and this transparent command of the evidence gives them all the more authority!	
A **Accuracy**	Has the source been prepared with **care**? (Look out for warning signs like language errors or self-contradictions.) Is it **clear** not confused? Does it **fit** with things we already know? Is it based on solid, **research methods**? Are the research methods and data **transparent**, so they are available for **scrutiny**? Have they been **checked**? – E.g. scientific journals only publish **peer-reviewed** work. Journalists should "triangulate" key facts – i.e. seek more than one **independent** source to **confirm** them (though unfortunately, journalists are usually less transparent about their sources than academics are, often making us trust to their **professional standards**).	
B **Bias**	Does the source achieve **balance** by acknowledging a **range of perspectives**, or only consider their own? Can we spot likely biases that may twist the **selection** and **interpretation** of facts? Consider national/racial/political/other **loyalties**, and **belief systems** such as **religions** and **ideologies**. Bias may be unconscious and sincere, but people can also have **incentives** to "spin" facts (especially in politics and marketing) or even to lie (e.g. to influence voters dishonestly before an election) so consider **vested interests** – would the source gain anything by misleading people?	

Remember that evaluating a source is rarely as simple as placing it on a scale somewhere between “reliable” and “unreliable”. Certainty is rare, and we often have to make do with imperfect information. We have to ask not “Is it perfectly reliable?” but “Is it acceptable for our purposes?” Supposing someone is on trial for murder and their penalty is death – the standard of evidence required should be very high, and any reasonable doubt should be enough to prevent the conviction. On the other hand, supposing a child runs past us yelling that a tsunami is coming – we might not trust the child completely, but it would be wise to look for confirmation quickly, and get ready to run! In this world, and especially on the Internet, inaccurate information (either honestly or dishonestly) is very common, so we need a checklist to help us be reasonably confident that we are choosing good information to base our opinions on, and to reassure our readers that we have taken care to do so.

Adapted for IGCSE GP from The CRAAP Test. Visit www.igcseglobalperspectives.net for many other quality GP resources.
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