**Choosing Valid Sources**

**How current is the source?**

* When was the information published? Does your source need to be the most up-to-date resource available, or can you rely on older information?
* Has your source been revised or added to? Revised editions usually mean researchers found the first version useful enough to update.
* If it’s a website, do the links work? Broken links usually mean no one is tending to the website, and its information could be out of date.

**How relevant is the source?**

* How directly does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
* Who is the intended audience? Is the source suitably rigorous for your subject?
* Is this the only source you’ve found, or have you looked at others to compare? Your first shot might not be the most accurate. That holds for research as well as horseshoes.

**Who authored the source?**

* Is the author/publisher/source/sponsor reputable? Does the author have credentials applicable to the subject you’re researching, or other known and verifiable experience applicable to the subject?
* What organizations is the author affiliated with?
* Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address? Beware of the author who puts out information without giving anyone a way to question him/her.
* What do the extensions on the URL tell you about the site? Web addresses ending in .edu, .mil, and .gov are usually pretty safe and vetted. Take a more careful look at .org for affiliations. Sites with .com, .name, .info, and .net require more thoughtful appraisal. Also, does the web address use a tilda (~)? That often means an author has set up a personal page off another site for personal reasons or agendas.

**How accurate is the source?**

* When evaluating a source’s accuracy, you’re judging the reliability, truthfulness and correctness of its information. You’re again considering where the information comes from, whether it’s supported by evidence, another source, or from your own knowledge.
* Has the information been reviewed or referred to by other experts in the field?
* Does the source include references to other work, in either links or a bibliography?
* What’s the tone? Does the language seem like the author is ranting about the subject, or does the language give the impression of calm reason? Not all rants necessarily disqualify a source from being accurate, but passion or biased language should make you question the source more closely.
* Are there spelling, grammar or typographical errors? These usually indicate a source that the author has not checked well, nor have others checked it. Be wary of the lone, unedited voice as an authoritative source.

**What’s the purpose of the information?**

* Information always exists for a reason. The most common are to teach, sell, entertain, and persuade. Your job is to determine whether the author or authors have made their intentions clear.
* Information can be fact, opinion, or propaganda. Point of view and tone can often give you clues about whether the information is  objective and impartial, or whether there are political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases.

Adapted from “Evaluating Information – Applying the CRAAP Test” Meriam Library California State University, Chico; <http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/eval_websites.pdf>; accessed 11/13/2014. Web.