

Evaluate Your Sources

Overview

Not everything you find in a library database is perfect for your research, and not everything you find on the open web is useless. Evaluation is the process of deciding whether a piece of information is credible, relevant, and appropriate for your specific academic assignment.

This step is critical: building a well-written thesis on weak sources is like building a beautiful house on a foundation of sand.

Prerequisites

Before you begin evaluating sources in depth, you should have:

- A clear [research question](#).
- A list of initial search results from the [library catalogue, databases, or the open web](#).

The Two Evaluation Frameworks

There is no single "perfect" way to evaluate a source. Different types of information require different approaches. We recommends two complementary frameworks depending on where you found the information: the **CRAAP test** (best for academic papers and books) and the **SIFT method** (best for open-web sources and news).

Method 1: The CRAAP Test (For Academic Sources)

The CRAAP test is a checklist designed to help you deeply analyse a traditional academic source, such as a journal article or a published book. Ask yourself these questions as you review the text:

- **Currency:** When was the information published or last updated? Does your topic require very current information (e.g., fast fashion marketing trends), or are older historical sources acceptable (e.g., Bauhaus design principles)?
- **Relevance:** Does the information directly relate to your research question? Who is the intended audience? Is the academic level appropriate for a university assignment?
- **Authority:** Who is the author or publisher? What are the author's credentials or university affiliations? Are they qualified to write on this specific topic?
- **Accuracy:** Where does the information come from? Is it supported by evidence? Has the article been peer-reviewed (checked by other experts before publication)? Can you verify the claims in another source?
- **Purpose:** Why does this information exist? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade? Does the author make their intentions clear, or is there hidden bias?

What is Peer Review? If an article is "peer-reviewed," it has passed a high standard of academic accuracy because it was evaluated by independent experts before publication. Most library databases (like EBSCO) have a checkbox allowing you to filter your search strictly for peer-reviewed journals.

Method 2: The SIFT Method (For the Open Web)



["SIFT Infographic"](#) by Mike Caulfield is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

When you are researching current events, business trends, or design precedents on the open internet, the CRAAP test is often too slow and assumes too much goodwill. The [SIFT method](#) (developed by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield) uses a technique called "lateral reading." Instead of staying on the website to see if it looks professional, you open new tabs to see what the rest of the internet says about that site.

- **S - Stop:** Before you read the article or use it in your research, stop and ask yourself if you know the website or the author. If you don't, do not trust the information until you complete the next three moves.
- **I - Investigate the source:** Open a new tab and search for the author or the organisation (e.g., search their name on Wikipedia). Are they a respected think-tank, a partisan lobby group, or a satirical website?
- **F - Find better coverage:** If the source is making a major claim (e.g., "A new EU law bans all synthetic fabrics"), open a new tab and search for that specific claim. Are major, trusted news outlets or government sites reporting the same thing? If not, the claim is likely false or exaggerated.
- **T - Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context:** Articles often quote people out of context or use misleading photographs. Click through the links provided in the article to see if the original source actually says what the author claims it says.

Evaluating Different Source Types

Your faculty and your methodology dictate what kind of sources are acceptable for your assignments.

For Architecture and Design (FoAD)

- **High Value:** Peer-reviewed architectural history/theory journals, published monographs by respected academic presses, primary source plans and drawings.
- **Medium Value:** Respected professional magazines (e.g., *Architectural Review*, *Domus*). These are excellent for understanding precedents and contemporary practice, but they are not peer-reviewed.
- **Low Value:** Pinterest, ArchDaily, or design blogs. These are great for visual inspiration and finding the *names* of buildings, but they should rarely be cited as academic authority in a thesis.

For Business Administration (FoB)

- **High Value:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, official government/EU data, financial reports from audited databases.
- **Medium Value:** Articles from respected business press (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*, *The Economist*), white papers from major consultancies (e.g., McKinsey). Use the SIFT method here to check for corporate bias.
- **Low Value:** Unattributed blogs, opinion pieces, random company websites.

Next Steps

Once you have evaluated your sources and selected the most credible and relevant ones, you must read them critically and extract the data you need.

Continue to: [Read, Manage, and Synthesize](#)

