



Evaluating Websites (Elementary)—English Transcript

If a student on your school playground started talking to you about how polar bears are moving into people's backyards and eating out of their garbage, you'd probably want to know more about this student, and if this information were true, before you took it seriously. The same goes for websites.

There is a lot of useful information on the internet. But since anyone can publish a website, it's important to stop and think carefully about online information before you use it. This process is called evaluating websites. In this tutorial, you'll learn how and why to think carefully about information you find on the internet, some questions to consider when you're looking at websites, and some practical tips for how to evaluate internet sites you visit.

Many of us use the internet to gather information for all sorts of things. We might use that information to learn more about a favorite sports team, find a video game tip, watch a video to learn skateboard tricks, or to learn how to do an experiment for a science fair. Our whole way of viewing the world is based on the information that we encounter, and a lot of that information comes from the internet. That's why it's so important to evaluate the information that you find on the internet. Of course, this is also good for your school assignments. It will make your research better.

First, as you scan and read a website, stop, and pay attention. Is the site a good fit? Can you read and understand the information on the site? Does the reading level feel comfortable? Is the information appropriate for your age? Does the site have information that makes you uncomfortable? Are there ads on the page that do not seem right for your age? If the site is not a good fit, leave it, and try a different one.

Remember, you are in control of your internet searching, and it's your job to find the best sites for you. If a website seems like a good fit, the next step is to use TRAAP. You want to avoid the traps of the internet and capture the good information. TRAAP stands for Timeliness, Relevance, Accuracy, Author, and Purpose. TRAAP will help you navigate the web and avoid the traps of the internet.

The T in TRAAP stands for Timeliness. Timeliness means information that is current and is up-to-date, as the topic needs. First, find out when this information was created. The date could be when the information was posted, originally written, or copyrighted. If you can't find a date, use your own judgment to determine if the information is current. People do view topics differently and talk about them in different ways at different times.

Technology and science provide good examples of how information can change over time. Consider Pluto. Not that long ago, our solar system had nine planets, and Pluto was one of them. Recently, Pluto was reclassified from a planet to a new category called dwarf planets. Since then, astronomers have been discovering even more dwarf planets. Now, scientists are



again debating Pluto's planet status. This is an example of how timeliness matters when selecting a source. In this case, recent information is needed.

Scientists and researchers discover new information all the time. Therefore, your sources of information need to be up-to-date for some topics like climate change, endangered species, medicine, or technology. Other topics have information that does not change much over time, and older information can still be useful. For example, pet care, the Oregon Trail, and how to make cookies are examples of topics that have not changed significantly over time. So older articles on these topics would be useful.

The R in TRAAP stands for Relevance. Relevance means the information presented matches your research needs. Does the information relate to your research question? For example, if you're trying to find out if that student on the playground was right about polar bears eating people's garbage, then a site talking about grizzly bears in Yellowstone National Park may be interesting, but it will not answer your question. In this case, a site with current events from a newspaper or magazine could be better to answer your question about polar bears eating garbage.

Another question to ask yourself is does the source add something new to your knowledge of the topic, or does it back up information you have already found? Both new information and information that supports what you've learned elsewhere are important. Finding information in multiple sources confirms that it is accurate and helps you build a better argument. This relates to the first A in TRAAP-- Accuracy.

Accuracy means the information is true and correct. As you browse the site, be on the lookout for signs that indicate whether or not the information is accurate. Look for correct spelling and proper punctuation and grammar. Information that is consistent with what you know or have found in other sources is more likely to be accurate. Stop and wonder about any information that is significantly different from other sources. Also, responsible sources usually list or cite where they found their information, so question an author who does not include citations.

Speaking of authors, the second A in TRAAP stands for Author. Author means who is responsible for creating the information on the site. Sometimes this is a person, but other times it could be a group of people or an organization. Let's investigate the author of the information. Look for the words About or Info, which may include information about the author. These links tend to be on the perimeter, or edge, of the site.

While reading, think about these questions. Is the author an expert on this topic? For example, if you're studying endangered species, an article by a zoologist, or even an article written by a reporter citing animal experts, would be a good source. Is the author from a trusted group like a university, an organization, or a government agency? If it's a trusted organization like the San Diego Zoo, they would be more likely to have accurate information as a way to maintain their reputation.



If you are uncertain about an author or organization, do an internet search to see what others think about their work and ideas. Getting to know the author may help you understand their purpose for providing the information.

The P in TRAAP stands for Purpose. Purpose means the reason the author is posting the information. Sites are often created to sell, entertain, persuade, or inform. The best kind of source to find for research is the site intended to inform. One way to detect the purpose of a site is to look at the end of the URL or web address. The last three letters of the URL determine the site's domain. Examples are .org, .edu, .com, and .gov.

Educational or government sites are more likely to provide trustworthy information. These sites usually end in .edu or .gov like this example from NASA about the Hubble Space Telescope, which is a .gov site. Commercial sites are usually motivated to make money in some way, and they usually end with .com. These sites are often not as useful for research because their purpose is to sell their product, like this example from lego.com.

Personal sites typically have the person's name in the URL, but not always. If you're looking for information about a well-known person, like the author Rick Riordan, his site would be a good source for information about his books. However, personal sites from unknown people are not necessarily reliable. For example, if you find a website from a fifth grader who is a fan of Rick Riordan, you would need to evaluate it even more closely.

Here's another tip for understanding a web address. Shortening the URL to find the home page of the site you're viewing might give you details about the group or organization that is providing the information. On this page about giant pandas, we learn that the author is the World Wildlife Federation by shortening the URL to www.worldwildlife.org.

By clicking on the About link, we learn the World Wildlife Federation is a conservation organization dedicated to preserving nature, which might indicate this organization's bias. Sources intended to persuade readers are biased. An author's opinions, thoughts, and feelings in favor of or against a topic are called bias.

The information a person or group presents reflects his or her bias. An article about salmon runs from the fishing industry would emphasize a different point of view than an article written by a biologist. Both articles would contain biased points of view. The fishing industry's main goal is to make money from salmon fishing. The biologist's main goal would be to limit fishing to preserve the salmon runs.

Your job, as a researcher, is to recognize the biases in both points of view, and decide if the information suits your research question or not. When you decide to use a site, knowing about the author's purpose will help you best use the information.

TRAAP is your tool to find the best information the web has to offer. In review, TRAAP stands for Timeliness, Relevance, Accuracy, Author, and Purpose. Remember, you want to avoid the



traps of the internet and capture the good information. This will help you make better decisions and stronger arguments. So when that kid comes up to you on the playground and says polar bears are eating garbage in people's backyards, just TRAAP him.

For specific examples and for more information about this topic and the entire research process, explore OSLIS. Thank you to the Oregon CLIP project for allowing the OSLIS committee to adapt their tutorials. OSLIS-- Learn to Research. Research to Learn.