

# 4-STEP SOURCE ASSESSMENT

HONE YOUR INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS  
ASSESS SOURCES



## STEP 1 BY ITS APPEARANCE

- 1) **URL**: Does the URL indicate the source is a commercial site (.com), government site (.gov), nonprofit (.org), educational (.edu), a site from a foreign country (.ca - Canada; .uk - United Kingdom)?
- 2) **Format**: Is the source well formatted and laid out nicely for easy navigation?
- 3) **Ads**: Does the source contain lots of ads that interfere with your reading? Is the site a **content farm** (that produces a large amount of relatively low-quality articles to maximize page views and advertising revenues)?
- 4) **Errors**: Does the source have glaring spelling errors or grammar mistakes?
- 5) **References**: Does the source mention other sources or have a reference list?



## STEP 2 BY INVESTIGATION (CRAAP TEST)

- 1) **Currency**: When was the content published or posted? Does current information matter for your topic? Do the links in the content work?
- 2) **Relevance**: Does the source answer your research question? Who is the article written for? Is the source too technical or too general for your topic? How in-depth is the source?
- 3) **Authority**: Does the author have reliable credentials for the topic? What is the author's affiliation (i.e. university, association, company)? Has the author published content on this subject before? How in-depth are those articles?
- 4) **Accuracy**: Has the information been reviewed by editors (**editorial review**) or author's peers (**peer review**)? Is the author's idea original or is it from other sources? Are the original sources reliable? Does the language or tone seem unbiased and free of emotion?
- 5) **Purpose**: Is the source created to inform your research or to persuade you to accept certain point of view, or to sell you something? Check the About Us section to investigate the purpose.



## STEP 3 BY LATERAL READING AND CRITICAL THINKING

- 1) **Single vs Diverse Source**: Have you consulted multiple sources and explored original sources on the topic? Have you found diverse or competing facts and opinions?
- 2) **Supported vs. Unsupported Claims**: Are the statements in the sources supported by evidence? Are the opinions supported by arguments or are they just unsupported claims? Are there discrepancies between different sources?
- 3) **Logical Reasoning vs. Fallacies**: Are the arguments convincing? Does the premises of the arguments logically support the conclusion? Or does the arguments contain any fallacy?
- 4) **Anecdotes vs. Research**: Is the source based on personal accounts or research? Is the research method valid and reliable? Who has funded the research and what are their views of the issue?



## STEP 4 BY REFLECTION

- 1) **Pierce the Filter Bubbles**: Am I in a **filter bubble** where my searches surround me with views and opinions I agree with, while shelter me from opposing perspectives? I need to actively search for different perspectives and listen to their reasons.
- 2) **Examine My Own Biases**: Have I brought my own biases to the assessment? Am I objective and have I weighed the reasons from different sides?
- 3) **Question My Own Interpretations**: Have I brought my prior knowledge or assumptions to this assessment? Are they questionable?
- 4) **Keep an Open Mind**: Have I seen the potential for other explanations or reasoning?
- 5) **Suspend My Judgement**: Have I recognized the disruptive nature of a simple fact? I should suspend my judgement until I see the big picture.

## COMMON COGNITIVE BIASES

Cognitive biases are a deviation from rational thought, so it impairs our ability to judge the value of information:

- **Confirmation bias** is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that affirms our prior beliefs or hypotheses.
- **Similarity Bias** involves perceiving people who are of our ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status or profession more positively than those who are different from us, which often leads to negative bias of people who are not like us.
- **Anchoring Bias** is the tendency to rely too heavily, or "anchor", into one piece of information over another when making decisions. Usually we anchor into the first piece of information acquired on our subject.
- **Availability Cascade** is a self-reinforcing process in which a collective belief gains more and more plausibility and credibility through its repetition in public discourse. Availability Cascade works somethings like this "repeat something long enough and it will become true".
- **Self-serving Bias** is the tendency to claim more responsibility for successes than failures. It may also manifest itself as a tendency for people to evaluate ambiguous information in a way that is beneficial to their interest.
- **Groupthink** is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in a dysfunctional outcome. Group members try to minimize conflict in order to reach a consensus decision without critically evaluating alternative viewpoints.

## COMMON LOGICAL FALLACIES

Fallacies are common errors in reasoning; they are often identified because they lack evidence that supports their claim.

- **Hasty Generalization Fallacy**: the conclusion is not justified by sufficient or unbiased evidence, for example, conclusion based on insufficient samples.
- **Red Herring Fallacy**: use irrelevant information to divert the attention of listeners or readers from the original issue.
- **Slippery Slope Fallacy**: reject certain action, with little or no evidence, one argue that it will lead to a chain reaction resulting in an undesirable end.
- **Ad hominem Fallacy**: attack on the character of a person rather than his or her opinions or arguments.
- **Straw Man Fallacy**: oversimplify an opponent's viewpoint and then attacks that hollow argument.
- **Bandwagon/appeal to popularity**: ask you to accept an opinion because the majority believes it.
- **Appeal to authority**: insist that a claim is true simply because a valid authority or expert on the issue said it was true.

## FURTHER READINGS

- Dowden, H. B. (2019). Logical Reasoning. Retrieved from <https://www.csus.edu/indiv/d/dowdenb/4/Logical-Reasoning.pdf>
- Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, fast and slow (1st ed.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Senge, P. (2006). The fifth discipline : The art and practice of the learning organization (Rev. ed.] ed.). New York: Doubleday/Currency.
- Ariely, D. (2008). Predictably irrational : The hidden forces that shape our decisions (1st ed.). New York: Harper.

We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.  
- Aristotle and Will Duran