

# Guide to Information Literacy: Source Selection and Types

You will be selecting sources of various types to complete course work throughout the semester; source types and how to verify both type and value for your work are outlined below. Information literacy, or media literacy, is the **ability to find, select and evaluate information (media) for different purposes**; in addition to being a General Education Student Learning Outcome, Information Literacy is a vital skill in our information, or knowledge, economy. Three BROAD categories of sources are described below, with relevant aspects of the **CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) test** also used by our libraries (search 'CRAAP' and you will find many examples as guides).

Throughout the semester you'll be asked to find sources of two broad types; semi-scholarly and sociological. These types are mutually exclusive (meaning NO source can be BOTH types) AND sociological sources are a special sub-type of 'scholarly' sources. Unit Tests and other assignments require you to label your sources by type in reference lists; ONLY 'semi-scholarly' and 'sociological' sources count so using those labels is essential.

**Semi-Scholarly sources are informal or non-scholarly sources; these are likely to be ONLINE ONLY and you will therefore use PARAGRAPH numbers in in-text cites when using these sources.**

**Semi-Scholarly sources** are systematically produced and relatively unbiased; they are NOT peer reviewed. The **Semi-scholarly page of my website lists a wide variety of viable sources, NOT peer-reviewed AND produced systematically and providing high quality information.** Sociology Blogs, high-quality news sources, investigative journalism, reports by government agencies or non-profit research/information organizations are broad categories of semi-scholarly sources; my website does NOT provide an exhaustive list and full references are essential for verifying source type. The **CRAAP test** for semi-scholarly sources is below.

- **Currency:** the most important reason to use semi-scholarly sources is their currency; current issues ARE news and Sociologists often blog about recent/current events, Non-profit and governmental organizations REGULARLY report on their work.
- **Relevance:** these sources should be DIRECTLY on topic; these are the most widely available sources so you should be able to find semi-scholarly sources that are DIRECTLY relevant to your interests/topics and research questions.
- **Authority:** varies and is wide-ranging but qualify as EXPERTS; authors are well-established in their fields OR have first hand knowledge/experience that can be reported objectively OR as 'lived experience'.
- **Accuracy:** determined by the approximation of scientific method USED to produce information; DATA driven, empirically focused, objective REPORTS reflecting systematic procedures and CLARITY about process or bias are VITAL elements.
- **Purpose:** will be clear either in the mission of the organization or publisher OR clearly stated by author.

**AVOID OTHER blogs, editorials, opinions, or other INTERPRETIVE sources because they do NOT meet CRAAP test qualifications for Semi-Scholarly sources.** Opinion pieces (including blogs, editorials, and interpretive commentary that is NOT data driven) FAIL the 'Purpose' aspect of the CRAAP test. Opinion pieces have built-in bias of the author; you need semi-scholarly sources for straightforward information about a current social problem/issue.

**MUCH of the information we are exposed to in a digital world FAILS the 'Authority' element of the CRAAP test.** Generally, if you CANNOT identify information required for a complete reference (author, source beyond the title of the article, publisher/producer, publication date), the source FAILS the 'AUTHORITY' element of the CRAAP test. In addition, much of the **information we are exposed to FAILS the 'Purpose' element of the CRAAP test.** Since your goal in selecting semi-scholarly sources is INFORMATION, learning HOW to identify bias is important. While information shared as social media may not be biased, bias cannot be identified OR managed if authority and accuracy cannot be verified. Increasingly, many web-based publications have the 'trappings' of reliable sources but **do not have independent** review boards or an **independent** review process. Information you may find online includes **propaganda, ADVERTISEMENTS, and** sources that **deliberately present information with specific biases.** **If you have ANY questions about the original source of the information, AVOID using the source.**

**The exception to the above is Personal Experience; YOURS (and potentially others') is valuable IF appropriately contextualized with additional information from source types listed below.** You (or other individuals) are the 'Authority'; **Relevance of YOUR (or other individual's) experience passes the CRAAP test ONLY WHEN it is contextualized to become social fact.** See **Guidelines to Social Facts** for more information. From a sociological perspective, Relevance has to do with how many people share the experience (or opinion/attitude) and their associated social characteristics.

**SOCIOLOGICAL sources are SCHOLARLY (meaning Formal AND Peer-Reviewed) AND the authors are sociologists (or have terminal degrees in relevant/approved fields).** Books (other than your textbook) and book reviews do NOT qualify as Sociological Sources because they are often NOT research-based; **Peer Reviewed research articles authored by sociologists qualify as sociological sources.** The Library Research Tools are your source for Scholarly – and therefore Sociological – research articles. We will learn to how to verify that sources are scholarly AND how to verify that authors are sociologists over the semester. Until then, if you are only vaguely familiar with the library, **the Library Staff is great! To find out more about Library resources and how to use the library, chat with a reference Librarian.** Elizabeth Workman ([emworkman@salisbury.edu](mailto:emworkman@salisbury.edu)) is our Sociology Library Liaison and she is wonderful; she's hoping to hear from you!