Evaluating Sources

If you’ve ever gone fishing you know that you seldom keep every fish you reel in—some might be too small or just not the kind you’re after, so you toss them back. The same is true with research; not every article, book, or website you find will be a keeper.

It is wise to take part in this kind of selective capture because the quality of your final research project is related to the quality of the sources you use. Applying the CARP Test is one way to evaluate the effectiveness of a source before you start writing.

Ask yourself these questions to determine if the source is one you should keep….

Currency: The timeliness of the information
♦ When was the information published or posted?
♦ Has the information been revised or updated?
♦ Is the information current or out-of-date for your topic?
♦ For web resources — are the links functional?

Authority: The source of the information
♦ Can you determine who the author/creator is?
♦ Who is the publisher or sponsor of the work/site?
♦ Are the author’s credentials or organizational affiliations listed?
♦ What qualifies the author to write about this topic?
♦ Has the information been peer-reviewed or refereed?

Relevance: The value of the information for your research
♦ Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
♦ Is the information at the appropriate level (i.e., not too elementary or advanced)?
♦ Who is the intended audience?

Purpose: The reason the information exists
♦ What is the intent of the information? to sell? entertain? inform? persuade?
♦ For web resources, how might the domain (.com, .gov, etc.) reflect the purpose?
♦ Do the authors/sponsors clearly state their intention or purpose?
♦ Is the information fact? opinion? propaganda?
♦ Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
♦ Are there ads on the website or in the resource? How do they relate to the topic being covered (e.g., an ad for Prozac next to an article about depression)?