



## Evaluating & Choosing Sources – English Transcript

You've been assigned a research project, and you've done some of the work already. You have your topic, came up with your research questions, selected keywords, and did some searching. Whew! Now you have a pile of potential sources. How will you decide which sources to use?

One method for evaluating sources is TRAAP. TRAAP stands for Timeliness, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. Use the TRAAP method to evaluate each potential source, eliminating those that do not pass any of the TRAAP tests.

**Timeliness** -- Ask yourself, is the information up-to-date or current? Older information will still be useful with some topics, like history, but others, such as technology, will require very recent information. If timeliness matters, be sure to check the date that your book, magazine, newspaper, or web site was published or created and eliminate the sources that do not fit your needs.

**Relevance** -- Ask yourself, does the information match my topic? Determining this may take a little more time. First, review your research questions. Does the source provide any answers to them?

As you determine relevance, sort potential sources into three piles. **Yes** -- This source answers one or more of your questions. It has the right amount of details and is written at a level that you can understand. **Maybe** -- This source may answer some questions but you may need to read further to tell. Save it for later in case you need more information. **No** -- This source does not answer any of your questions after all.

Here are some of the tips to help determine relevance. For this example, let's say that we're doing a report and need to answer this question: How can tall buildings be more energy efficient? If your source is a book, you'll want to look at the table of contents to see just what the book covers. Does it seem to cover any of your questions? You can take a look at the index at the end of the book to see if specific topics you need to research are included.

For all of your sources -- books plus articles from magazines, newspapers, or web sites -- skim through them to look at any heading and subheadings, illustrations, and captions. Does it look like the information will answer some of your questions?

Next, read a few paragraphs or pages. Does the information seem too detailed? Too basic? Just right?

Next, let's look at the two A's in TRAAP. The first is authority. Ask yourself, is the author an expert? The second A is accuracy. Ask yourself, is the information reliable and correct?

For books, magazines, or newspapers that you find in a library or in a database, an editor or librarian has already checked for authority and accuracy.



However, since anyone can post information to the Internet, you need to evaluate Internet information for authority and accuracy to see if the author's information can be trusted. To learn more about evaluating web sites, watch the OSLIS video on that topic.

Purpose is the final test in TRAAP. Determine for yourself what is the reason the information was created? The purpose could be to entertain, to persuade, or to inform, and for a web site, the purpose could even be to make money. Figuring out the purpose or reason that the source was written may be obvious or may require you to consider who is providing the information and why they are doing so.

For example, does the source show bias? Sources that are intended to persuade readers are biased. An author's opinions, thoughts, and feelings in favor of or against a topic are called bias. It's up to you to determine if an author is taking a stand or is trying to show all sides of an issue. Then you must decide whether or not you need that particular information for your project.

After testing for timeliness, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose, your pile of potential sources may be much smaller. That's a good thing. You've determined that the remaining sources should be useful for your project.

Now let's TRAAP a source together. First, review your research questions. Let's use a question from an earlier OSLIS video: How do bees work together as a community?

Let's look at a potential source, *The Honey Bee's Hive: A Thriving City*.

The first test in TRAAP is timeliness. In a book, the copyright date is usually on the verso, or back, of the title page. *The Honey Bee's Hive* was copyrighted or published in 2010. As of the making of this video, 2010 is new enough for our topic, because we're pretty sure that scientists have known for some time now how honey bees live in a hive, which is our focus. However, if we were focused on a more time-sensitive topic, like colony collapse disorder, we would want to rely on newer information.

The next test in TRAAP is relevance. Let's take a look at the table of contents to see what topics are covered in this book. It is easy to see that the chapters -- "Honey Bee Town," "Gathering Food Outside," "Working on the Inside" -- probably have good information to answer our question about bees working together. Some of the other chapters look promising, too.

Looking at the index at the end of the book, we see potentially relevant keywords like colony, hives, and worker bees. The index will be even more helpful once you've done some reading on the topic and you want to find out more about a specific aspect, perhaps something like royal jelly.



Now let's take a look at a page or two, scanning to see if the information is too basic or too difficult. After reading a few sentences, this seems like helpful and easy to understand information.

The next two tests are authority and accuracy. Because we found this book in a library, we know that a librarian checked for both. Thanks for checking, librarian!

Now, what's the next test? Yes, it is purpose. After browsing through the book, you can determine that the author's purpose is to inform. The author is not trying to persuade, entertain, or sell. Instead, the author wrote this book to teach the reader information about honey bees and their hives. Because you want to know more about how honey bees work in a community, the purpose works for you.

You have TRAAPed this book and have concluded that it will be a good source for your project. It's going into the Yes pile.

You don't always have to try each of the five tests or try them in the exact order. Sometimes, just a quick look at a possible source will reveal that it is not a good fit. For example, when you take a closer look at the potential source called *Winter Bees*, you see that the book is actually a collection of poems about winter. Because it does not provide any facts, its purpose is not to inform the reader, so it will not work for your project. Put it in the No pile.

While it may be timely and the author may be an expert, it turns out that this article from CBS News is only about killer bees. However, one paragraph does talk about how they work together when attacking, so let's put this in the Maybe pile. It is interesting, but the amount of relevant information is limited.

Here's one last source to evaluate. Do you think this magazine article is relevant based on the question, how do bees work together as a community? After reading the title and headings, you can tell that it is about the parts of a bee. Even though the information is interesting, accurate, and easy to understand, it is not relevant or useful since it does not relate to the research question. Into the No pile it goes.

Once you have TRAAPed a pile of Yes sources, it's time to begin reading and taking notes. Learn how to do this in another OSLIS video.

For specific examples and for more information about this topic and the entire research process, explore OSLIS. Thank you to Bearport Publishing for granting permission to use their book in this video. OSLIS -- Learn to Research. Research to Learn.