
Succeeding in a digital world

Questions to ask of online information

This document provides a summary of the key points to bear in mind when evaluating information sources.

*Page one sets out criteria for quick evaluation of information, using the acronym **CAN**.*

*Page two lists more detailed criteria, using the acronym **PROMPT**. These criteria are suitable for more in-depth evaluation of sources, for example, when studying.*

Credibility

- How much do you know about the person or organisation providing the information?
- What sort of authority do they have for any statements or opinions they put forward?
- How do they back up opinions or facts?
- What sort of language do they use? Language that is either emotionally charged or vague can be a danger sign.

Agenda

- Can you detect any bias or agenda?
- Who has put the information there?
- Do the authors state clearly the viewpoint they are taking?
- Can you detect any vested interests? (You may need to dig deep to uncover these.)

Need

- How important is it that the source is trustworthy?
- Think about what you are planning to do with any information you get from it.

Presentation

Consider the language, layout and structure:

- Is the information presented and communicated clearly?
- If it is a website, are there distracting advertisements?

Relevance

Look at the introduction or overview to find out what it is mainly about:

- Is the article or source relevant to the topic you are researching?
- Is it at the right level for what you need?

Objectivity

- Is the article or other source biased or motivated by a particular agenda?
- Is the language emotive?
- Can you detect hidden, vested interests? (For example, promoting a particular viewpoint or product.)

Method (for research reports)

- Is it clear how the data was collected?
- Were the methods appropriate?
- Can you trust the data?

Provenance

- Is it clear where the information has come from?
- Can you identify the author(s)/organisation(s), and are they trustworthy?
- Are there references/citations that lead to further reading and are they trustworthy sources?

Timeliness

- How up to date is the material?
- Is it clear when it was written?
- Does the date of writing meet your requirements or would it mean it is obsolete?