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- Does the date of writing meet your requirements or would it mean it is obsolete?