

The CRAAP Test

Sarah Blakeslee

California State University, Chico

Sometimes a person needs an acronym that sticks. Take CRAAP for instance. CRAAP is an acronym that most students don't expect a librarian to be using, let alone using to lead a class. Little do they know that librarians can be crude and/or rude, and do almost anything in order to penetrate their students' deep memories and satisfy their instructional objectives. So what is CRAAP and how does it relate to libraries? Here begins a long story about a short acronym...

Last spring while developing a workshop to train first-year experience instructors in teaching information literacy, I tried to remember off the top of my head the criteria for evaluating information resources. We all know the criteria I'm referring to. We've taught them a hundred times and have stumbled across them a million more. Maybe we've read them in our own library's carefully crafted evaluation handout or found one of the 58,300 web documents that appear in .23 seconds when we type "evaluating information" into the Google search box (search performed at 11:23 on 1/16/04). Most of these documents follow a similar theme. After convincing us of the necessity of evaluating information, or warning of the dangers of not evaluating information, they list five (or is it six) keywords or criteria, each of which spawns five or six related questions that we should ask concerning the information in hand. Some documents even provide handy checklists and scoring systems so that an information source can be evaluated, question by question. There is no lack of advice available from libraries, librarians, and educators about how to evaluate information. There is a grand consensus among all walks of academia that with the infinite variety and levels of scholarship on the Internet, the evaluation of information is one of the most important skills that we, as librarians and instructors, can teach our students.

So why, given the importance of my task and my familiarity with the subject matter, couldn't I remember what those criteria for evaluating information were? I could, based on my age, find evidence to support the excuse that my inability to successfully remember the criteria had something to do with my "time of life".

Early Alzheimer's seemed unlikely, as I still maintained a pretty good record for showing up at the reference desk during my appointed shifts. And I could always comfort myself with the oft-quoted (at least by librarians) words of Samuel Johnson if I could only remember what they were. You know the one I mean, something about being ok as long as we know where to go to find information even if we don't know it ourselves. Certainly, as evidenced by my successful Google search, I knew where to go to find the information I needed about evaluating information. But what about my students? Would they be as successful? If I couldn't remember these important criteria when I worked with them almost daily how could I expect my students to remember them?

I had no doubts concerning their capabilities in Googling in the same brilliant way as I, but I did have some nagging doubts about their motivation to do so. Did I trust them to hold up a piece of information, to ponder, to wonder, to question, and to remember or seek the criteria they had learned for evaluating their source that would instantly generate the twenty-seven questions they needed to ask before accepting the information in front of them as "good"? Honestly, no, I didn't. So what could I do to make this information float to the tops of their heads when needed? Musing over handouts and web pages from libraries across the country, looking at the slight variations used to describe the same general idea, I found myself thinking what millions have previously thought when faced with the task of making something more memorable: What about using a mnemonic? I could come up with a catchy acronym!

Now, the definition of an acronym in this instance is a "name formed by combining the initial letters or parts of a series of words" (thanks to the American Heritage Dictionary). My first efforts were less than impressive. AAOCC? CCOAA? COACA? (That one was better--it reminded me of chocolate.) Then suddenly, with all due respect to "The Waste Land" and T.S. Elliot (because I had not ceased in exploration at the end of all my exploring), I arrived where I had started and discovered what I had initially been looking for on our own library handout. With some reordering of words and one synonym, I saw it. Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. CRAAP. I had my acronym. Not only was it memorable due to its associative powers, it also

meant something in the context in which it would be used. For every source of information we would now have a handy frame of reference to inquire, "Is this CRAAP?" With a minimal amount of tinkering the old handout was revised and resurrected as the CRAAP Test (Appendix A, or http://www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/eval_websites.pdf).

Since that time I have used the CRAAP acronym and handout not only in the workshop that first sparked the idea but in the first-year experience class I teach each fall, and casually, in passing, to wake up my fifty minute one shot classes. B.C. (Before CRAAP), in my first-year experience course, I would always have at least one class devoted to evaluating information. I would distribute and review the old evaluation handout in class, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation with a slide for each criterion and the requisite questions listed below the criterion. The class would then break into groups and engage in an activity where each group reviewed and ranked articles and web sites for their usefulness in answering a given research question. After earnestly and diligently applying the criteria from their handout to the items being evaluated they would almost always come up with the correct answers, proving once and for all that information literacy was within their grasp. Questions based on what they had learned in the lecture and from the handouts would always be included on the exam covering the information literacy unit, but typically when I would ask them to list the evaluation criteria, two out of five was about the best I could expect.

Although my approach to teaching the evaluation of information A.C. (After CRAAP) is not much different, I find that the acronym helps capture the students' attention during the lecture, while also providing me the opportunity to use more amusing graphics in my PowerPoint presentation and have more fun lecturing. More importantly, their ability to remember the evaluation criteria on tests has improved dramatically.

Following is my favorite story concerning the CRAAP test. Last semester I passed out the CRAAP handout in preparation for our discussion about evaluating information. One student, after studying the sheet intently for a few moments, got a puzzled and then concerned look on his face and said to me in a hushed voice as I passed by, "Did you know this spells CRAAP?"

Library Services for International Students

Lisa Klopfer
Eastern Michigan University

International students are often some of the heaviest library users, and if treated well, can be strong library supporters long after they have graduated and returned to their home countries. Librarians, on the other hand, have often been puzzled over meeting the needs of this group, because it is so heterogeneous. Some international students were trained in English-medium schools, while some are still struggling to master English. Some are experienced with American-style libraries, others have extensively used different library systems, and some have had no library experience. International students tend to be web-savvy (in fact, prospective students may first contact the library over the web even before they have moved to the U.S.), but have had no experience with online catalogs. Each brings different cultural baggage concerning asking for help, evaluating and citing sources, etc. With such a mixture, how can a library offer appropriate assistance?

Many libraries do not offer special services for international students, assuming that they will select the instruction, reference or other help from the same set as all the other students. Other libraries offer a starting point or welcome message for international students, which point to general instruction services. Only a small number of libraries offer assistance that is focused on the special needs of international students.

I am just beginning a research project on library service to international students. I have gathered a set of examples of how libraries present their services to international students on the Web. I offer it here in the hopes that it will be useful to librarians planning similar programs. Further examples from other libraries are welcomed. (lklopfer@emich.edu).

Sites that mention the library on web pages for international students.

The Imperial College (Britain) mentions the library as the first item on its general information guide, but gives no contact information. http://www.ic.ac.uk/publications/welcome_ic/life.htm

Ohio State University Library (USA)'s general help pages include a glossary of library terms. <http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/liblanggd.html>