

Of food and facts

Before we can eat wild rice, wheat, or other grains, we have to do some prep work. First, we have to separate the edible seeds from the inedible chaff, a process called “winnowing.” The plant is pounded to separate the seeds from the chaff, and then poured through the air so that the nutritious seeds fall down and the indigestible husks blow away. If we do this process well, we are rewarded with food that will nourish us. If we do this poorly, we end up either throwing out too much of the good food or eating too much of the indigestible hulls.

The same kind of prep work needs to be done before we consume information. If we are efficient with our informational winnowing, we’re rewarded with knowledge that will sustain and strengthen us. If we do this process poorly, we risk either ignoring important information and tossing it aside or “eating up” information that can harm us.

How do we make sure we’re gathering up the good stuff while we avoid collecting the chaff? This will always be a challenge because of our [“cognitive biases”](#) - automatic shortcuts that we take when we think. These biases function in two ways:

1. They act as filters that determine which information we notice and which information we overlook.
2. They distort the information that does make it through our attention filter. For instance, [Confirmation Bias](#) ensures that we hone in on and remember information that supports the beliefs that we already hold, and it also causes us to ignore or distrust information that opposes our pre-existing beliefs. The [Dunning-Kruger](#) effect makes us overconfident about what we think we know and keeps us from acknowledging how much we don’t know.

When we acknowledge that all our thinking is done under the influence of our cognitive biases, we can build in workarounds to help us overcome our blind-spots.



Image by [Daniel Kirsch](#) from [Pixabay](#)

We can:

1. **Choose curiosity over conviction.** If we approach interactions as opportunities to learn, instead of arguments to win, we create openings for “ah-ha” moments of understanding.
2. **Go looking for different viewpoints.** When we leave our comfortable echo chambers, we are virtually guaranteed to hear points of view that will broaden our perspective.
3. **Watch ourselves think.** The next time you feel very, very “right” about something - pause. Examine your assumptions, and then *search for ways to prove yourself wrong*. Playing devil’s advocate for yourself takes bravery, but the payoff is more deliberate and balanced decision-making.

So what happens when our more thoughtful thinking leads us to understand that we were wrong about something? This is an [uncomfortable, but necessary](#), place to be. Our resistance to being wrong gets us stuck in ruts of thought and behavior, and keeps us trapped in situations that no longer work for us. [We can get better at being wrong](#) by giving ourselves and others permission to make changes and shift when we learn something new. We can remind ourselves that what is correct and needed will change as circumstances change. Then, we can accept that we need to do something different, instead of resisting change just because it can feel too much like being wrong.

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We’re here to help!

Ask a nurse or provider if you’d like to talk.

Cut the CRAAP!

Separating fact from fiction



These days, between word-of-mouth, social media, online news, TV, and radio, we've got no shortage of information. Not all of it is fit for consumption though. What we need is a way to hone our "informational winnowing" skills, so that we get better and better at separating helpful facts from potentially dangerous fiction. CRAAP can help us cut through the confusion.

Currency

How current is the data? Some information doesn't change much over time (how airplanes stay in the air), but there are some things about which we're learning so much, so quickly that it's vitally important to have the most up-to-date information (what we know about COVID-19 and how to stop its spread).

Relevancy

Does the information really meet your needs? Information will be framed differently depending on the target audience. Is there enough (or too much) complexity in the information to effectively provide the information that you need? Have you checked out several sources to find which one most thoroughly answers your questions?

Authority

Who is the source of the information? Is that person qualified to speak on the topic? What are their credentials? With what organizations are they affiliated? Remember that just because someone has letters behind their name, they may not be an expert. For instance, a biologist may not be an expert in microbiology, and M.D.s are usually very well trained in only one type of medicine and aren't experts in other branches.

Accuracy

Is the information backed up with evidence and can you find the sources of that evidence? Can you then cross-check it with other sources? Has the information been reviewed by people with expertise in the subject matter? Is the language or tone meant to provide you with solid information or to whip up your emotions? If in written form, are there errors in spelling or grammar? If so, this can indicate a slipshod approach to the whole article, including shoddy research.

Purpose

Why does this information exist? Is it to inform? Teach? Sell? Entertain? Persuade? Are the creators or sponsors up-front about their intentions, or are they trying to camouflage one as another? For instance, are they trying to sell you something, but have made it seem like informing or teaching. Is what you're seeing, reading, or hearing fact, opinion, or opinion trying to pass itself off as fact? Is the point of view presented objective and impartial, or are there biases? These biases could be political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal.

Trustworthy sources for fact-checking:

[FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org/)— A project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, this organization checks the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players in the form of TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases. Includes pages dedicated to correcting [misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic](#), [science](#), [health care](#), [political advertising](#), [internet misinformation](#), & [social media rumors](#).

[Snopes.com](https://www.snopes.com/)—an independent publication owned by Snopes Media Group. Started in 1994, it's the oldest and largest fact-checking site online.

[Newsguardtech.com](https://www.newsguardtech.com/)— NewsGuard employs a team of trained journalists and experienced editors to review and rate news and information websites based on nine journalistic criteria. The criteria assess basic practices of credibility and transparency. Based on a site's performance on these nine criteria, it is assigned a red or green rating, indicating its credibility.