

Information Hygiene

We live in an age of information. Whether you want to know about history, math, language, art, science, or pretty much anything else, the answers you need are just a couple clicks away.

But how do you know the information you find is actually true? And how can you help others double check it?

Practicing good information hygiene helps make sure that the sources you use are trustworthy, and that you give them proper credit when you include them in your schoolwork.

Hygiene is all about keeping clean. Just as you wouldn't pick up something rotten and nasty, or spread toxic waste all over the place, you shouldn't use worthless information in your research, or share bad ideas that aren't true.

Garbage information comes in three main types: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.

Misinformation is when someone shares false, incomplete, or misleading ideas without realizing it.

Disinformation is when people spread lies on purpose.

And malinformation is when the information is true, but doesn't tell the whole story or is used to expose information that should be kept private.

So how do we avoid these three types of misleading info? Make sure you always check the source's credibility, currency, and bias.

Credible sources have a reputation for being trustworthy and believable. Established news sources, verified online encyclopedias, and official organizations are usually pretty safe. Also any school or library website (ending in .edu) will give you good info.

Currency means that the source is up-to-date. For example, new scientific discoveries are made every day, so a recent article about solar power is more likely to be accurate than one written years ago.

Bias can be hard to spot, but it's all about letting a personal opinion get in the way of the facts. Does the author tell both sides of the story? Do they use neutral, accurate language? Do they encourage you to make up your own mind? If so, they are probably a fair and unbiased source of information.

Once you've found true information, you have to make sure you give the author credit by citing your source. Citing lets other people check your information for themselves. It also avoids plagiarism, or stealing the work of another person and passing it off as your own.

To cite a source, include the title of the work, the name of the author, and the platform and date it was published on. Ask your teacher for specific citation guidelines if needed.

Practicing good information hygiene will help your research stay free of any false or harmful information while keeping your sources clear and credited. Remember, the better your information, the better your thinking!