Worksheet
Detecting Crap on the Internet

Here's a checklist of tactics to use to help you judge the credibility of web pages. Different tactics will be useful for different web pages – use your judgment to decide which tactics to try first. If you find some of these don't apply, or don't seem to give you useful information, think about why that is. On the next page, make notes about the credibility of each webpage you explored, and which tactics you used to determine its credibility.

1. Authorship
- Is the author of a given page named? Who is s/he?
- What do others say about the author?

2. Sources cited
- Does the article include links (or at least references) to sources?
- What do these sources tell us about credibility and/or bias?

3. Ownership of the website
- Can you find out who owns the site (e.g. look it up using www.easywhois.com)?
- What is the domain name? Does the "pedigree" of a site convince us of its trustworthiness?
- Who funds the owner's activities (e.g. look them up on www.sourcewatch.org)

4. Connectedness
- How much traffic does this site get (e.g. use www.alexa.com for stats/demographics)?
- Do the demographics tell you anything about the website's audience (see alexa.com again)?
- Do other websites link to this page (e.g. google using the search term "link: http://*paste URL here*")? If so, who are the linkers?
- Is the page ranked highly when searched for from at least two search engines?

5. Design & Interactivity
- Does the website's design and other structural features (such as grammar) tell us anything about its credibility?
- Does the page have an active comment section? If so, does the author respond to comments?

6. Triangulation
- Can you verify the content of a page by "triangulating" its claims with at least two or three other reliable sources?
- Do fact-checking sites have anything useful on this topic? (try www.factcheck.org)
- Are there topic-specific sites that do factchecking? (e.g. www.snopes.com for urban legends, www.skepticalscience.com for climate science). Note: How can you tell whether *these* sites are credible?

7. Check your own biases
- Overall, what's your personal stake in the credibility of this page's content?
- How much time do you think you should allocate to verifying its reliability?

Note: This list is a summary of the ideas in:
Rheingold, H., Weeks, A. "Crap Detection 101: How to Find What You Need to Know, and How to Decide If It's True*". In *Netsmart: How to Thrive Online*. MIT Press, 2012

Web page #1

a) Website & page:

b) Overall credibility:

c) Which tactics helped?

d) Which tactics didn't work (why)?

Web page #2

a) Website & page:

b) Overall credibility:

c) Which tactics helped?

d) Which tactics didn't work (why)?

Web page #1

Web page #3

a) Website & page:

b) Overall credibility:

c) Which tactics helped?

d) Which tactics didn't work (why)?

Web page #4

a) Website & page:

e) Overall credibility:

f) Which tactics helped?

g) Which tactics didn't work (why)?