

TREC 2020 Health Misinformation Track Assessing Guidelines

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Assessor Instructions

Before any judging takes place, assessors should be giving the following instructions:

Assume there is a search user who has a question of the form "Can X Y COVID-19?", where X is a treatment and Y is one of: cause, prevent, worsen, cure, or help. The user is searching the document collection for answers to this question. Your job is to assess documents on:

- 1) Does this document contain material that the search user might find **useful** in answering the question?
- 2) Does the document **answer** the question? If so, is the answer yes or no.
- 3) How **credible** is the document?

Search Topics

Assessors should **only** be provided with each search topic's description, which is always presented as the question the search user wants to answer. For example "Can ibuprofen worsen COVID-19?" The topics as distributed to participants contain additional information that assessors do not need to view.

Judging a document as Useful or Not Useful

An assessor should judge a document as **useful** if the document contains information that a search user would find useful in answering the search question.

For a useful document, it does not matter whether the assessor believes the information provided in the document is incorrect or could be of harm to the searcher. The assessor is judging whether or not a search user would be likely to find the information useful regardless of its quality.

As the Health *Misinformation* track, the problem with misinformation is that search users do not recognize it as misinformation and instead find it to be useful information. We need to record if a user would likely find this document useful for answering the topic's question independent of the document's correctness and credibility.

Documents are automatically **Not Useful** if they:

- are written in a language other than English.
- contain adult material.
- are unreadable or broken.

Judging if a document answers the question

For all **useful** documents, the assessor should then judge if the document answers the question. If a document is not useful, assessors should not determine if the document contains an answer, for by definition of being not useful, it will not contain an answer.

The document should give a definitive answer to the specific question. Please note that the questions use different verbs: cause, prevent, worsen, cure, help.

Assessor should answer the following question: **What answer does the document provide for the question?**

Judgment choices are:

- Document does not provide a definitive answer to the topic's question.
- Document says that the answer to the topic's question is "Yes".
- Document says that the answer to the topic's question is "No".

Assessors are finding the answer provided by the document and not what the assessors believe is the correct answer. Assessors only determine a document's answer to the question for useful documents.

Judging a document's Credibility¹

Understanding the purpose of a document should be the first step to judging credibility. The assessor's opinion of the purpose of a document and the correctness of information matters in judging credibility. Credibility is only judged if a document is judged **useful**.

When assessing credibility, assessors should not confuse it with *usefulness* of a document and judge credibility **independently** from usefulness.

¹ The idea of understanding the purpose of a website before judging its quality, determining the amount of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness (E-A-T), and the cdc.gov example of high E-A-T are ideas based on Google General Guideline. (<http://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com/en//insidesearch/howsearchworks/assets/searchqualityevaluatorguidelines.pdf> Last Accessed: 17/12/2018).

For a document that contains an answer to the question, a credible document provides support for its answer and that support is deemed to be credible by the assessor.

Assessors should use their judgment to judge the credibility of documents as described below:

- **Credible**

To help determine if a document is credible,

- Try to determine the amount of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness of the document. Some websites (e.g. www.cdc.gov) have high amounts of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness.
- Check for an author or an institute that published the web document.
- Look for author credential and qualification and determine if the person has the qualification to write this document.
- Certain documents can be written by a non-expert from a well-known newspaper/news channel website and citing the information they provide in their articles. Such documents can be considered credible.
- Certain documents may not contain author information. Check whether there exist any citations of credible sources such as universities research/clinics or government websites.
- Check where the document is published. Medical publishers or hospitals/clinics or government websites or online newspapers with wide circulation are usually credible sources.
- Check for references and sources. Credible sources often cite medical publications and/or lab studies.
- Check how well-written, well-researched and organized is the information.

- **Not Credible**

- If the assessor does not find a document to be credible, they judge it not credible. Particular examples:
 - Determine if the document is actually for advertising or marketing purposes. If so, the website might be biased or a scam designed to trick people into fake treatments or into buying medical products that do not live up to their claim.
 - Determine if the information posted is from a personal blog or a forum, or by a non-expert person providing a medical product review or providing medical advice. Such subjective personal opinions or one point-of-view are considered not credible.

- Determine whether the website provides or states claims that go against well-known medical consensus (e.g. smoking cigarettes does not cause cancer).

Important Notes

1. The assessors are not the topic authors or the search users. Assessors are making judgments in the context of a search user who does not know the correct answer.
2. Usefulness is with respect to a search user with the question and not based on correctness nor credibility. For example, a search user may consider an incorrect document useful because they do not know the correct answer. Likewise, a search user can find non-credible documents useful, for the search users cannot always judge credibility accurately.
3. An assessor should find the answer provided by a document to the topic's question regardless of the known correct answer.
4. In contrast to usefulness, the assessor's expert opinion on credibility is used to judge credibility. An assessor should assess the credibility of the document if the document is judged as useful.