

Evaluating Web Sites: Ask These Questions

When accessing magazine or journal articles from a library database, there is the expectation that the information is accurate, credible and reliable – it has gone through the editorial process. However, there is no guarantee that information found on the web is credible or reliable. Therefore, it is very important that you ask some basic questions to judge the quality of the information you find on the web.

Authority

Who publishes/produces the web site?	Use the web address (URL) to determine the web site "Domain." Common domains include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • .edu - Educational Institution • .gov - Official Government Agency • .org - Nonprofit Organization • .com - Commercial Site
Can you identify the author?	There should be an easily identifiable person, organization or agency that takes responsibility for creating and maintaining the information being presented.
Can you contact the author or organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing Address • Phone Number • E-mail Address
What are the credentials of the author?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Degrees of the Author • Additional Relevant Training • Institutional Affiliation (i.e. Professor at Yale University) • Reputable Agency or Organization (i.e. American Medical Association)

Accuracy

Is the web site free of grammatical and spelling errors?	Typos, misspellings and poor grammar should not be overlooked when assessing a web site.
Can the information presented be verified?	Sources of information should be properly documented or cited. Is "work cited" information clearly displayed?
Does the information seem credible?	How does the information compare with other sources on the same topic? If possible, compare with sources that have gone through the editorial process - books, magazine and journal articles, etc.

Objectivity

<p>Is there a clear bias, or is the information presented fair and balanced?</p>	<p>Is the purpose of the site apparent or clearly stated? Many nonprofit organizations have a certain agenda they are trying to promote, and their information may be biased - it may be good information, but biased. Tip: most nonprofit organization sites have a link on the main page labeled "About Us." Read about the organization to determine any potential bias. Use this tip for commercial and other types of sites as well.</p>
<p>What is the overall style of language used on the site?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information presented in an objective, reasoned manner? • Is the information presented inflammatory and emotional?
<p>Does the site include advertising?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the ads clearly separate from the content? • Is the site simply created to promote a product or service?

Timeliness

<p>When was the information published?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a copyright date or date of creation clearly displayed? • When was the page last updated? • Are links on the site current and working?
<p>Is it important that the information be current?</p>	<p>If you are dealing with current events, medical or scientific information, currency may be vitally important. If you are researching the causes of the U.S. Civil War, then currency may not be as vital.</p>