

How to Evaluate Web Sources

Internet sources are easy to locate, but not all sites provide valuable and reliable information. You need to know which sites to use for your research and which ones to avoid. Consider the following characteristics about each website you find.

What type of site is it?

Websites sponsored by government organizations (.gov) or by colleges and universities (.edu) provide reliable, updated information. Commercial sites (.com) are generally less reliable. If you see a ~ in the URL, do not use this site unless it was created by a professor or expert. The ~ is usually an indicator of a personal web page, which is often not reliable. Also, look for words like “blog” or “blogspot” in the URL or any other telltale signs of a personal blog. While professional news blogs may be useful, personal blogs do not usually provide much credible information, so unless your research project involves studying specific bloggers’ posts, you should not use blogs as sources for your research.

Who is the author? Who is the sponsor?

Check the author’s credentials to see if this person is qualified to write about the site’s subject matter. Also, see if any sponsor is affiliated with the website, and if so, who the sponsor is and what agenda the sponsor may have.

How up-to-date is the web site?

As a general rule, the more recently and frequently a site is updated, the more reliable its information is.



How does the site look to you?

Examine the site closely. How organized is the site? Do you see a logical presentation of information, or does it look sloppy, with lots of distracting images? Does the site's information seem correct? Compare it with information from other sources you have found. Do you see any typographical errors or misspellings in the site’s material? If so, this may suggest that the web site was hastily thrown together and is not reliable. Check the site’s hyperlinks. See if they are working correctly, and if so, where they lead.