Evaluating Internet Sources

How Do I...

Undergraduate Research Guides

Part of the “Evaluate My Sources” Series

The criteria below will assist you in evaluating web pages for use as academic sources. Be sure and look at the criteria in multiple categories prior to making a decision regarding the academic quality of a source.

How did you find the website?

- Was it found via a search conducted through a search engine? Unlike library databases, the accuracy and/or quality of information located via a search engine will vary greatly. Look carefully!
- Was it recommended by a faculty member or another reliable source? Generally, an indicator of reliability.
- Was it cited in a scholarly or credible source? Generally, an indicator of reliability.
- Was it a link from a reputable site? Generally, an indicator of reliability.

Identify the website's domain

Think of this as "decoding" the URL, or Internet address. The origination of the site can provide indications of the site's mission or purpose. The most common domains are:

.org - An advocacy web site, such as a not-for-profit organization.
.com - A business or commercial site.
.net - A site from a network organization or an Internet service provider.;
.edu - A site affiliated with a higher education institution
.gov - A federal government site.
.il.us - A state government site, this may also include public schools and community colleges.
.uk (United Kingdom) - A site originating in another country (as indicated by the 2 letter code).
~ - The tilde usually indicates a personal page.
Accuracy and Objectivity

- How accurate is the information presented? Are sources of factual information or statistics cited? Is there a bibliography included?
- Compare the page to related sources, electronic or print, for assistance in determining accuracy. Compare the information in the following examples:
  - The True But Little Known Facts About Women and Aids (http://147.129.226.1/library/research/AIDSFACTS.htm)

Examine the DHMO page for accuracy:
  - DHMO.org (http://www.dhmo.org/)
- Does the page exhibit a particular point of view or bias? example: Why We Shouldn't Legalize Assisting Suicide
- Is the site objective? Is there a reason the site is presenting a particular point of view on a topic? Compare the following examples on secondhand smoke
  - Site #1 (http://www.mayoclinic.com/invoke.cfm?id=CC00023)
  - Site #2 (http://www.smokingsection.com/issues1.html#smoke)
- Does the page contain advertising? This may impact the content of the information included. Look carefully to see if there is a relationship between the advertising and the content, or whether the advertising is simply providing financial support for the page. Example:
  - Will the best protein please stand up? (http://www.universalnutrition.com/athletes/victory.cfm)