



How to evaluate information on the web

The web is great! Yes, it is – we agree. There is a wealth of information available. However, when it comes to conducting your research and writing your paper, be sure that your information sources are reliable. **Anyone can publish anything on the web!**

Here are some key points to consider when deciding whether or not to use information from the web:

Accuracy – Are there errors in the information/facts presented? Who is the sponsoring institution (government, university, commercial company)? Is the sponsoring institution well known in the field? Does the information consist of documented facts or personal opinion?

Authority - Is the author or source of the information identified and his/her qualifications in posted? Does the site exhibit good grammar, spelling, and literary composition? Does the site have an editorial or peer-review process? What is the domain - .gov, .edu, .org or .com? Often the domain type will give you a clue to the purpose of the site.

Objectivity - What is the site's purpose: to inform, explain, persuade or sell? Are there ads on the site? Is the information presented with a minimum of personal bias?

Currency - Is the content of the work up-to-date? Is the date of creation or most recent revision date clearly shown?

Coverage – Is there comprehensive coverage of the subject matter? Is the information relevant or useful for your needs?

Be careful – web sites can be misleading and not often what you expect. Is that site for real? Or is it a satire or spoof? A classic example is:

www.whitehouse.gov Versus www.whitehouse.org

In this case the .org site probably was not what you were looking for!

Other things to look for:

- There is some way to contact the people responsible for the site; usually an e-mail address, sometimes a phone number and street address, too.
- Pages within the website look similar: they may have the same background color, or there will be the same logo on every page.
- Pages within the website link back to the home page, and to elsewhere in the site.
- The website shows signs of being proofread; there are no spelling or grammar errors.

Sometimes, there isn't a good Web site. If you're having a really hard time finding anything for the topic you're interested in, you may want to look elsewhere: in books, magazines, or newspapers. Also, remember that you can always ask a librarian for help searching for any kind of information you need.