



Evaluating Internet Sources

How Do I... Undergraduate Research Guides

Part of the "Evaluate My Sources" Series

In this guide you will learn how to:

- Evaluate internet sources
- Ask the right questions when evaluating internet sources
- Identify the criteria you need to evaluate internet sources

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?



How you located the site can give you a start on your evaluation of the site's validity as an academic resource.

- ◆ 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.

Need More Help? Ask a Librarian!

Chat:
www.library.illinois.edu/askus

Text:
217-686-4361

Phone:
217-333-8589

Hours:
<http://www.library.illinois.edu/services/hours.php>



Authority



Look for information on the author of the site. On the Internet anyone can pose as an authority.

- ◆ Is the author's name visible? Does the author have an affiliation with an organization or institution?
- ◆ Does the author list his or her credentials? Are they relevant to the information presented?

Example: Florence Nightingale
<http://www.countryjoe.com/nightingale/>

- ◆ Is there a mailing address or telephone number included, as well as an e-mail address?

Example: American Psychological Association
<http://www.apa.org/>

This is both an indicator of the timeliness of the information and whether or not the page is currently maintained.

Currency



- ◆ Is the information provided current? When was the page created?
- ◆ Are dates included for the last update or modification of the page?
- ◆ Are the links current and functional?

Functionality

The ease of use of a site and its ability to help you locate information you are looking for are examples of the site's functionality.

- ◆ Is the site easy to navigate? Are options to return to the home page, tops of pages, etc., provided?
- ◆ Is the site searchable?
- ◆ Does the site include a site map or index?



Check

out other How Do I...
Guides in this series, Evaluate My Sources:

- Choosing the Best Source
- Is It Scholarly?

Accuracy and Objectivity

There are no standards or controls on the accuracy of information available via the Internet. The Internet can be used by anyone as a sounding board for their thoughts and opinions.



- ◆ 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:

- ◆ HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Women (<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/graphics/women.htm>)

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.universaln nutrition.com/athletes/victory.cfm>)

