

Evaluating Websites

The Internet can be a great source of information, but not all websites are created equal. Books and journal articles must go through editorial processes (such as fact-checking and peer review) that websites usually do not. Because of that, while **all** information sources, print and electronic, must be evaluated, websites must be scrutinized even more closely.

Quick tips

- The first result is not always the best. Be picky! Choose the best sources you can find.
- Look for sites ending with **.gov** and **.edu** first – those will likely be reliable sources and may provide links to other reliable sources as well.

About Wikipedia...

Wikipedia is a fun website to browse through, and it always shows up toward the top of any internet search results, but it is **NOT A RELIABLE RESEARCH SOURCE**. There are plenty of good websites for research, but Wikipedia is not one of them.

The more questions you can answer “yes” to, the more reliable the website is.

1. Authority

- Is the person or organization responsible for the content stated? [Check for “contact us” links]
 - Rule of thumb – if you cannot identify the responsible party you should not use the source.
- Are any credentials listed? Is there an “About” or “Who We Are” link?
 - For a personal author, look for the person’s (1) title, (2) affiliation, (3) experience/background, and (4) contact information. For an organization, look for (1) information on who owns or operates it and (2) its history and purpose.
- Does the site include a physical address and phone number for the person or organization?

2. Objectivity

- Sites espousing a particular point of view can still be good sources. A web page may use highly reliable data to sway readers. But, keep any obvious bias in mind.
- Is the site free from advertising?
 - Advertising is not wrong if the ads are easy to distinguish from the content. You should beware of advertising that can influence content. ****A site that is attempting to sell you something should usually be avoided.****

3. Accuracy

- Is any evidence given? Are the sources listed & can you check them?
- Is the content free from grammatical, spelling and typographical errors? Is the overall presentation done in a professional manner, or does it look amateurish?

4. Currency

- Is the content current? Be sure the information is not so old that it is not helpful to you.
- When was the Web page updated? Is the date specified on the page?