Evaluating the Credibility of Websites

Although there is a lot of useful information on the internet, not all information is reliable, valid, or credible.

Why check website credibility?
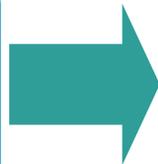
Websites are easily set up by Individuals or groups, who may create a logo, apply copyright to their material, and present material online with the appearance of credibility and backing by a reputable organisation. The information provided may not align with other credible works on the topic.

Given that self-published work is not usually used in academic writing, and the internet contains much self-published work, care must be taken to assess the source of material you wish to use in your assignment.

Use the questions below to help you critically evaluate websites. You will not usually need to answer every question listed or search in all the locations suggested. For example, the Statistics New Zealand website can be considered to contain reliable information and only currency and relevance of the information you have sourced would need to be assessed.

How to Use this Guide

For a checklist method of website evaluation see pages four and five of this guide.

THE EXPERIENCE YOU NEED & THE SUPPORT TO SUCCEED

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What to look for	Where to look
Credibility **1. Who is the author?** What are the author's qualifications and from which institution? Is the website really a personal page which gives the appearance of representing an organisation or larger group? If it is a genuine organisation, does the author's writing align with the organisation's values and goals? Do contact details allow opportunity to communicate with the author and ask them questions? Is the tone and style of writing factual? Are there grammar and spelling errors?	Look for tabs titled "About us," "Philosophy," "Background," "Biography". Check in academic databases to locate other publications by the author. Search for this person online. Consider the tone, style and quality of writing. Inappropriate tone and style, and poor grammar and spelling are signals that may indicate poor credibility. Look at the URL domain names to help determine the type of organization, for example, .gov or .govt — Government .org — Organisation .co — Company .ac or .edu — Academic or educational .com — Commercial (can be used by private individuals) Check on line for significance of a domain name if you are unsure.
2. Authority: Is the author qualified to comment? Does the author have relevant expertise, experience or previous relevant publications? Has this person been cited by others?	Check online to see if there are other publications by this author. Check the author's qualifications. Search for publications by this person on ResearchGate or Google Scholar.

What to look for	Where to look
Accuracy **Can you verify the information?** Are the references used real, credible, and relevant? Is the information consistent with other authors' findings?	Check sources/references used. Research other publications on the same topic.
Currency **Is the information current?** Is there a publication date? Is there reference to recent published material?	Look for publication and revision dates. If the webpage is undated, content cannot be placed in time making it difficult to assess the currency of the information. The copyright date at the end of a website is not considered the publication date of the webpage.
Bias **Is the information one-sided?** What is the purpose of the website? Who, therefore, is the intended audience? Is there a professed or apparent commitment to a particular point of view, product, or service? Is any bias acknowledged? Are alternative sides of the issue or topic presented? Is advertising present on the page? The presence of advertising may signal bias towards advertisers' products, values, and beliefs.	Decide if the purpose is to persuade, present a point of view, disclose, entertain, sell, justify the author's own actions or opinions, or present data and facts. Check for sound argument, supporting facts, and references that include sources representing more than one point of view. Assess any advertising and links that are present.
Links **What do the website links tell you?** Are there any dead links? Who links to the page? Who does the page link to?	Follow links and assess their credibility. Links can give insight into possible bias. Note that a link to another organisation does not mean the information has been condoned or approved of by that organisation.

Checklist for evaluating a website

Credibility and Authority

Who is the author of the website?

      □ I cannot tell   □ The author is:..

What is the qualification of the author or group?

      □ I cannot tell   □ The author's qualifications are:.......................................

What is the relevant experience or expertise to comment on the topic?

      □ I cannot tell   □ The author's relevant experience or expertise is:....................

What does the URL tell me?

      □ I cannot tell   □ Type of organisation is:..

Does the website provide a way of communicating with the author?

      □Yes   □ No

Accuracy

What sources does the author use to back up their comments?

      □ I cannot tell   □ They cited:..

Are the conclusions drawn or information provided consistent with other authors' comments?

      □ I cannot tell   □ Other relevant citations include:.......................................

Do the sources cited contain sound material?

      □ I cannot tell   □ Yes   □No

Bias

What is the purpose of the website?   (choose one)

　　　□ To express personal opinion, beliefs, thoughts

　　　□ To entertain

　　　□ To persuade towards purchase of a product, service, or belief

　　　□ To encourage

　　　□ To inform

　　　□ To present data and facts

Information provided is:

　　　□ Balanced, objective or factual   □ Biased, subjective or opinionated?

　　　Are arguments well supported?   □ Yes   □ No

　　　Is bias acknowledged?   □ Yes   □ No

Currency

When the website was last updated?

　　　□ I cannot tell   □ Not important for my topic   □ It was updated:..........................

Links

Are the links to sound material?

　　　□ Yes   □ No

Are links broken?

　　　□ Yes   □ No

(Adapted from University of Maryland Libraries, 2014)

Material adapted from the following sources:

Berkeley Library. (2019). *Evaluating resources.*

http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html

Peterson, E. (2019). *Evaluate your sources.* University of Oregon.

https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/gateway/evaluate-sources

Undergraduate Library: University of Illinois. (n.d.). *Evaluating internet sources.*

https://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/wp-

content/uploads/sites/42/2017/07/evaluate_internet.pdf

University of Maryland Libraries. (2014). *Evaluating websites: A checklist*. University of Maryland.

https://lib.guides.umd.edu/c.php?g=327107&p=2195123

Useful Link
Evaluating Information - Applying the CRAAP Test

Updated January 2022