

Evaluating the Credibility of Websites

Although there is a lot of useful information on the internet, not all information can be considered reliable or valid and not all websites are credible. Individuals or groups are able to set up a website, create a logo, apply copyright to their material, and present material on-line with the appearance of credibility and backing by a reputable organisation or group. However, the information provided may not always align with other credible works on the topic. Given that self-published work is generally not used in academic writing, and the internet contains much self-published work, care must be taken to assess the material you wish to use in your assignment.

How to use this guide

Use the following questions to help you critically evaluate websites. You will not usually need to answer every question listed or search 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. For a checklist method of website evaluation see pages three and four of this guide.

What to look for	Where to look
<p><i>Credibility - Who is the author?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the author's qualifications and from which institution? • Is the website 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? <p><i>Authority - Is the author qualified to comment?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author have relevant expertise, experience or previous relevant publications? • Has the author been cited by others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for tabs titled "About us," "Philosophy," "Background," "Biography". • Check in academic databases to locate other publications by the author. • Search for the author online. • Consider the tone, style and quality of writing. Inappropriate tone and style, and poor grammar and spelling are signals which may indicate poor credibility. • Look at the URL domain names to help determine the type of organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> .gov or .govt- Government .org - Organisation .co - Company .ac or .edu - academic or educational .com - commercial (can be used by private individuals) • Check online for significance of a domain name if you are unsure.

<p><i>Accuracy – Can you verify the information?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the references used real, credible, and relevant? • Is the information consistent with other authors' findings? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check sources/references used. • Research other publications on the same topic.
<p><i>Currency – Is the information current?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a publication date? • Is there reference to recent published material? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for publication and revision dates. These are usually at the bottom of a web page. <p>If the page is undated, content cannot always be placed in time.</p>
<p><i>Bias – Is the information one-sided?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of the website? Who 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? • Are there any dead links? • Who links to the page? • Who does the page link to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • The presence of advertising may signal bias towards advertiser's products, values, beliefs, so you should assess any advertising present. • Follow links and assess their credibility. <p>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.</p>

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



Currency

When was the website last updated?

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

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 or service, or towards a belief
 To encourage
 To inform
 To present data and facts

Is the Information provided

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

Are arguments well supported?

- Yes No

Is bias acknowledged?

- Yes No

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

Bell, C. (n.d.). Critical evaluation of information sources. Retrieved from <https://library.uoregon.edu/guides/findarticles/credibility.html>

Evaluating Web Pages: Techniques to Apply & Questions to Ask. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>

University Library: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (2012). Evaluating internet sources: Tips and tricks for evaluating web sites. Retrieved from <http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/webeval.html>

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