

Internet Source Review

Are you using information from a website for your school report or project? How do you know what you read there is correct?

Since anybody can publish a webpage or a blog or an entry in a wiki, we must look carefully at something we read to make sure it is true, that is complete, and that it isn't misleading. Below are some clues and some tools you can use to evaluate what you read on an internet site. With practice, you will be able to recognize information of good quality from information that is false or misleading or out of date. If a website fails many of the tests shown in the table below, you might want to move on to another source for your information.

Website or webpage address:	http://	
Website or webpage name:		
Date retrieved from the internet:		
Notes:		
<u>Tests</u>	<u>What to look for...</u>	<u>Result:</u>
Authorship		
Is the author of the webpage named?	Look for a name at the top or the bottom of the page, or at the beginning or end of the text. If the content of a page is not associated with a person or an organization (for example, the Associated Press) who takes responsibility for the work then it may not be reliable.	
Does the author list his or her credentials?	Credentials are things that identify a person as an expert in an area. Examples include descriptions of experience or abbreviations like "PhD" after a name that indicates a level of learning or expertise.	
Is there contact information?	An email address or a telephone number show that the author is prepared to comment on or defend his writing.	
Do other authorities recognize the author?	If you can find references to this author in books or newspapers, or if other websites refer to the author as an expert, there is a greater chance he or she is providing good information.	
Notes:		
Publisher		
Is the website or webpage published by a known organization?	A website published by a well-known news organization like CNN or The New York Times, or by a college or university is likely to be more trustworthy than one published by an individual or an unknown group.	

Is the organization recognized elsewhere as an authority?	If you can find lots of references to the publisher of a website in other places, it is more likely that it is providing good information.	
Is the material published by the organization or simply hosted by them?	If the organization is providing the information itself, it is more likely to be reliable than if the organization is just providing a place for other people to write what they want. Information found in a forum or blog hosted by another organization should be examined carefully.	
Does the organization have a potentially biased point of view?	When somebody has a special reason to believe or promote something, they are said to be “biased”. For example, a company who sells a certain brand of bicycle might say that their bicycle is the fastest one available because they want to sell more bicycles.	
Notes:		
Referral		
Does the website or webpage offer links to other, similar sites?	If a website or webpage provides links to other resources that can back up its information or opinion, then the information being provided is probably more reliable.	
Is the website or webpage linked to from other places on the web?	If you can verify that other good quality sites on the web link to the website or webpage you are reading, it is more likely that the information is reliable. In Google search and other search engines, you can ask for websites that link to the one you identify.	
Do other websites linking to this one have the same purpose?	Look to make certain that any other websites that link to the one you are evaluating appear to be about the same subject matter. Random links often show that the websites are more concerned about trading readers than about providing truthful or meaningful information.	
Notes:		
Verifiability		
Can the information be verified from other sources?	If you can find books, magazines, newspapers, websites or other sources which agree with the information you are reading on a website, it is more likely to be true.	
Does the author prove his information is true?	For example, if you are reading about a science project does the author show the results of an experiment with pictures or video? Does he offer facts that you can check in other places?	
Notes		
Currency		
Is the information you are reading dated and is it current?	Even good information can become out of date when new things are discovered. Is there a date anywhere on the page? If you use your browser’s menu item to look at the “source” is there a date shown there?	
Has the information been updated or reviewed?	A note that the information was “updated” or “reviewed” with a recent date means that the author is attempting to keep the data current.	
Notes:		

Mechanics		
Is the web address a known organization?	<p>If the name of the organization is in the actual website address, it is more likely to be reliable than one with just a number as the address or one using a service for their address. These would be suspicious:</p> <p>http:// 207.69.188.186/~myarticle or http://www.freesite.org/special-information</p>	
Does a whois lookup match the web address?	<p>“Whois” is a special tool which can be used to discover the owner of a website. Go to:</p> <p>www.internic.net/whois.html or www.arin.net/whois/</p> <p>and type in the website you are evaluating. If the owner of the website matches the name of the website, it is likely more reliable.</p>	
How does the website or webpage look?	<p>If the website or webpage looks professionally crafted with good quality pictures, no errors, and links to other pages and websites, it is likely more reliable than one which looks like a beginner or amateur made the site.</p>	
Is there a lot of advertising?	<p>A website that has a lot of advertising, or pop-up windows, or that automatically takes you to another webpage is probably not reliable and could even be unsafe. Some news organizations rely on advertising to support their sites, but they will be easy to identify. A website which seems to be more about the advertising than the content on the site is best to leave alone.</p>	
Is the website “empty”?	<p>Some websites are set up just to refer web surfers to other places or to take advantage of typos in a web address. Sometimes they publish articles or writing that they have stolen from other places or that don’t really make sense when read all the way through. Be sure you have not typed the address with a common spelling error and examine the whole site to see if it makes sense together.</p>	
Can you get back to the base address?	<p>Even if a webpage has an address like this:</p> <p>http://www.a-big-website.com/page4/article2</p> <p>you should be able to type in the base address and get to the home page:</p> <p>http://www.a-big-website.com</p> <p>If not, the webpage you are looking at may be a fake or may be abandoned by the publisher.</p>	
Notes:		