

## Website Evaluation

Can you trust everything you find on the Internet? Do you need some tools to help you evaluate sites you are using for your research? Learn how to apply the following factors to help you determine the credibility of websites.

- **Who**
- **What**
- **When**
- **Why**
- **How**

Work your way through the five factors above to learn more about each. Remember: You need to consider ALL the factors when assessing a website's credibility. A website may mislead you with style while providing false content.

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**Who:** Since anyone can publish a webpage, it is important to determine WHO created it and what their credentials are. Some questions to ask:

1. Who is the author?
2. Is she or he associated with a reputable university or organization?
3. What is the author's educational background or experience?
4. Does the author or webmaster provide contact information?

The last segment of the URL or web address can also provide clues about the author. These "domains" identify the category the website falls into.

- .edu (educational institution)
  - .gov (government)
  - .com (commercial)
  - .org (non-profit organization)
  - .ca (Canadian)
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**What:** Content is the most important part of the website and must be critically examined. Some questions to ask:

- How relevant is it to your research needs?
- How balanced is the information on opposing perspectives?
- Is the information provided based on proven facts?
- Is the coverage basic or comprehensive?
- Is there a list of references or works cited?
- Is the information plausible? Trust your instincts.

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**When:** The currency of a website's information is important to consider. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is timeliness important to your information need?
- When was the information published?
- When was the website last updated?

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**Why:** There are many reasons websites are created. It is important to evaluate the purpose of each website to determine its' credibility.

- Does the information try to inform or persuade?
- Are they trying to sell you a product or idea?
- How objective or biased is the information?

Remember:

- .com sites are commercial and therefore may be trying to sell or promote a product.
- .org sites may also be trying to influence you.
- .gov and .edu sites are usually reputable.

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**How:** This factor can be used to evaluate how the information is presented. Navigation, links, layout and ease of use are important to examine. Here are some questions to ask:

- How easy is it to find information within the website?
- Are the links accurate and current?
- Is it easy to navigate through pages within the site?
- Does the colour, font size and use of animation add to or distract from the website's usefulness?