Evaluating Websites

If you’re trying to evaluate a website, keep these ABCs in mind as you review your sources for quality:

- Authority
- Bias
- Currency/Credibility
Authority

Step 1: What is the URL telling me?

First identify the domain. Then look for more information in order to determine the quality of your source!

.edu  
.gov  
.org  
.com

Usually a URL with a domain of .edu, .org or .gov is more reliable than .com and .net.

Keep in mind that words like “.wordpress” or “blogger” in the domain usually signify that it’s a personal blog rather than a news source. If slight variations of well known websites appear, such as “.com.co,” this is usually a sign that the website is a fake version of a source. However, remember that foreign reputable news organizations may have country-specific domains like the CBC in Canada (www.cbc.ca/) or the BBC in the UK (www.bbc.co.uk/)

Adapted from “False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical “News” Sources” by Melissa Zimdars: https://docs.google.com/document/d/10eA5-mCZLSS4MQY5QGb5ewC3VAL6pLkT53V_81ZyitM/preview
**Authority**

**Step 2: Who wrote it and why?**

Is the website's author listed along with his/her credentials?

Is there an “About Us” section of the website? Google the website’s title/domain name/authors to see if any of them have been reported as a source of fake news.

Is there any information about the credentials and backgrounds of affiliated writers, editors, publishers, or domain owners (who.is etc.). Is there a “Legal” or “Disclaimer” section?

A total lack of About Us, Contact Us, or any other type of identifying information probably means that the website is not a legitimate source of information!

**Tip: Use Google’s Advanced Search feature to get better results!**
Bias

Is the information presented to sway the audience to a particular point of view? Who is the audience? A certain political group, adults, children, researchers?

Depending on your purpose for using the website, the intended audience needs to be taken into consideration.

Keep in mind that Google’s “personalization” can bias your results!

Tip: Bias isn’t always a bad thing!

As long as a website is explicit about its political orientation, you might use it to get a valuable alternative point of view.
Currency/Credibility

Does the website provide the 'created' date and last updated' information?

For example, medical and scientific information usually needs to be current. But currency alone doesn’t verify the credibility of this type of resource.

Does the website mention/link to a study or source? Look up the source/study. Do you think it’s being accurately reflected and reported? Are officials being cited? Can you confirm their quotes elsewhere?

**Tip: Ask questions!**

Always try to verify details, facts, quotes, etc., with multiple sources, especially if the information seems to be too good to be true or is designed to create an emotional response.

For example, does the website frequently use ALL CAPS in headlines and/or body text? Does the headline or body of the text use words like WOW!, SLAUGHTER!, DESTROY!? This stylistic practice and these types of hyperbolic word choices are often used to create emotional responses with readers that is avoided in more traditional information sources.
More Resources to Help You Evaluate Your Sources

“False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical ‘News’ Sources” – An open resource created by Professor Melissa Zimdars of Merrimack College that provides both help with evaluating as well as a curated list of questionable sources:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/10eA5-mCZLSS4MQY5QGb5ewC3VAL6pLkT53V_81ZytM/preview

The CRAAP Test - There are many ways to evaluate sources, but the CRAAP test is the easiest to remember and stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose. You can find a nice overview for evaluating sources using the CRAAP Test here: https://www.refme.com/blog/2016/04/19/the-craap-test-an-easy-fun-way-to-evaluate-research-sources/

Trust it or Trash it? – This is a tool to help you think critically about the quality of health information (including websites, handouts, booklets, etc.). Click on Who said it? When did they say it? and How did they know? to guide you through the process.
http://www.trustortrash.org/

And remember, if you need help figuring out whether or not a source is reliable, contact a librarian!

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