



Evaluating Information On The Internet: a Checklist

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Cook Library Web Site

<http://cooklibrary.towson.edu>

Information on the Internet is not always reliable, factual, or current. It is your responsibility to determine its usefulness for your research. Try to select sources that offer as much of the following information as possible:

**Author's name (individual or corporate)
Author's credentials
Organizational affiliation
Date of page creation or revision
References**

Authority, Credibility, and Expertise

- ✓ Is there an author? Is the page signed?
- ✓ What are his/her credentials? Is the author an expert or authority in this field?
- ✓ Is there a link to information about the author or sponsor?
- ✓ Is contact information for the author or sponsor included in the document?
- ✓ Organizational authorship? Known and reputable organization
- ✓ Is there source documentation or a bibliography?

<i>Tips!</i>	Check domain (.com, .gov....) name Check URL Check at the bottom of the web page or Home page of a site Determine who/ what organization is responsible for site's content
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Currency and Accuracy

- ✓ Is the information up-to-date? Is there a published date on the web page?
 - Is the date clear as to its meaning (date of original source, date web site was created, most recently updated?)
 - Is the date timely for your research?
 - Are the links well chosen and up-to-date?
 - Is some areas (technology, medicine, law....) information can be outdated quickly
- ✓ Does the site cover the topic accurately? Comprehensively? Are the facts right?
- ✓ Can you understand what is said? Do details provide the whole picture?
- ✓ What is unique about this site?

Reliability and Coverage

- ✓ Is the information well supported by documentation? What sources did the author consult? What sources are recommended for further reading?
- ✓ Test credibility by corroboration with others
- ✓ Is the subject covered in depth? How valuable is the information? Would you find this information in a book? An encyclopedia?

Objectivity, Bias and Purpose

- ✓ What is the purpose of the web page? Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- ✓ Is it a personal, commercial, government, educational or organization site?
- ✓ Who is the intended audience?
- ✓ Is there any bias? Is there an overriding political or ideological agenda?
 - Is only one side of the argument presented?
 - Is it trying to persuade you or change your opinion?
 - Can you distinguish facts from opinion?

Usability and Design

- ✓ Is the site easy to navigate? User-friendly?
- ✓ Are the contents well labeled?
- ✓ Do all the design elements (art, graphics, buttons, etc.) enhance the message of the site?
- ✓ Is there consistency?
- ✓ Are the spelling and grammar elements correct?
- ✓ Are the pages clear and uncluttered?
- ✓ Do the links work?

10 ways to identify a *bad* web site:

1. Anonymity (no identified author/producer)
2. Bad grammar; misspelled words
3. No date on the document
4. Vague or sweeping generalizations ("this is the most important discovery---")
5. Very one-sided view
6. Overclaims ("thousands of children are murdered every year in the U.S.")
7. Intemperate tone or language ("stupid jerk--")
8. Conflict of interest (A cigarette company offering advice on smoking)
9. Numbers of statistics presented without an identified source
10. Absence of source documentation



Cite your information!

From the library web page, select CITING SOURCES----or, go to the RESERVES desk: MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers , APA, or Chicago.

Research Hint: For research help on this or any other research project, contact a librarian in person at the Cook Library Reference Desk, by phone at (410) 704-2462, or on the Web at <http://cooklibrary.towson.edu> by selecting "Ask a Librarian."