

Resources Source Evaluation Checklist

Use this ["Evaluating Web Resources" checklist](#) from Cornell University Library's Introduction to Research tutorial to evaluate the information sources you discover as a result of performing a search. Check the items in each of the following categories:

Purpose

- What is the purpose or motivation for the source? (e.g., educational, commercial, entertainment, or promotional.)
- Is it trying to sell you something? How easy is it to differentiate advertisement from content in the source?
- Based on your knowledge, is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
- Who is the intended audience for the information, and how is this fact reflected in the organization and presentation of the material?

Authority

- Is the author identifiable?
- What is the author's background? (e.g., experience, credentials, and occupation, and has he or she published anything else on the topic?)
- Does the author cite his or her sources?
- How current is the publication?
- When was the resource last updated or revised, and how often is it updated?

Reliability

How stable does the resource seem to be? The resource's dependability (particularly in the case of Web sites) is important if it is going to be cited as a source or recommended for use by others.

- For Web sites, do most of the links on the page work?
- From your evaluation of currency and authority, do you think the resource will be there the next time you visit it?

Coverage

- What information is included or omitted?
- Is the resource completed or under construction?

These are not the only criteria you should evaluate. Depending on what your professor has asked you for and on your research needs, you may need to look for certain kinds of material. In academic research in particular, your professor may ask you to find scholarly, peer-reviewed, or primary sources.

- **Additional Resources** Printable PDF: [SourceEvaluationChecklist.pdf](#)

Text modified from Cornell University Library. (2009). *Introduction to Research*. Retrieved May 14, 2009, from <http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/intro#2Findingbooks,articles,andothermater>

Evaluating Internet Information

"dot com" "dot gov" – suffixes and country codes explained

Any information that you use to support ideas and arguments in a research paper should be given some scrutiny. Printed materials that are collected in a library go through an evaluative process as librarians select them to include in their collections. There is also an evaluation of Web sites that are included in search directories, such as Yahoo!, at least to the extent of classifying and placing sites into a categorization scheme. However, sites harvested by "spiders" or "robots" for search engines don't go through any evaluative process.

There are no real restrictions or editorial processes for publishing information on the Web, beyond some basic knowledge of Web page creation and access to a hosting computer. Anyone can publish opinion, satire, a hoax, or plainly false information. To insure that the Web sites you use as information sources are acceptable for research purposes, you should ask questions about those sites. The following are some elements you should look at before deciding to use a Web site as a research resource:

Domain suffix

The term "dot.com" has become a ubiquitous phrase in the English language. The "dot.com" really refers to the domain of a Web site. Sites on the Web are grouped

by their URLs according to the type of organization providing the information on the site. For example, any commercial enterprise or corporation that has a Web site will have a domain suffix of .com, which means it is a commercial entity.

The domain suffix provides you with a clue about the purpose or audience of a Web site. The domain suffix might also give you a clue about the geographic origin of a Web site. Many sites from the United Kingdom will have a domain suffix of **.uk**.

Here follows a list of the most common domain suffixes and the types of organizations that would use them.

.com

Commercial site. The information provided by commercial interests is generally going to shed a positive light on the product it promotes. While this information might not necessarily be false, you might be getting only part of the picture. Remember, there's a monetary incentive behind every commercial site in providing you with information, whether it is for good public relations or to sell you a product outright.

.edu

Educational institution. Sites using this domain name are schools ranging from kindergarten to higher education. If you take a look at your school's URL you'll notice that it ends with the domain .edu. Information from sites within this domain must be examined very carefully. If it is from a department or research center at a educational institution, it can generally be taken as credible. However, students' personal Web sites are not usually monitored by the school even though they are on the school's server and use the .edu domain.

.gov

Government. If you come across a site with this domain, then you're viewing a federal government site. All branches of the United States federal government use this domain. Information such as Census statistics, Congressional hearings, and Supreme Court rulings would be included in sites with this domain. The information is considered to be from a credible source.

.org

Traditionally a non-profit organization. Organizations such as the American Red Cross or PBS (Public Broadcasting System) use this domain suffix. Generally, the information in these types of sites is credible and unbiased, but there are examples

of organizations that strongly advocate specific points of view over others, such as the National Right to Life Committee and Planned Parenthood. You probably want to give this domain a closer scrutiny these days. Some commercial interests might be the ultimate sponsors of a site with this suffix.

.mil

Military. This domain suffix is used by the various branches of the Armed Forces of the United States.

.net

Network. You might find any kind of site under this domain suffix. It acts as a catch-all for sites that don't fit into any of the preceding domain suffixes. Information from these sites should be given careful scrutiny.

Country domain suffixes	
.au	Australia
.in	India
.br	Brazil
.it	Italy
.ca	Canada
.mx	Mexico
.fr	France
.tw	Taiwan
.il	Israel
.uk	United Kingdom

Authority

Does the site you're evaluating give credit to an author? If no responsible author is listed, is there an indication of any sponsorship? When trying to determine reliability of information given in any medium, you want to have some idea of what the author's credentials are. Are they experts on the topic they are writing about? What is their educational background? Remember, anyone can publish on the Web. They don't have to know what they're talking about.

You also want to check and see if there's a list of sources given for the information on a site, like a bibliography that you would have to provide for a paper you're writing.

Currency

Information that is outdated may be incorrect or incomplete. A well maintained Web site will generally tell you at the bottom of the initial screen when it was last updated and maybe even when it was originally created and made available on the Web.

Links

An informational Web site in which all the hyperlinks are broken might not be a very reliable resource. Broken hyperlinks are not uncommon, due to the ever changing nature of the Web, but when there are many broken links on a Web site, it might be an indication that the site isn't maintained on a regular basis.

URL

The site address can give you clues as to ultimate sponsorship of a site. If you can't determine who wrote the site or who or what is sponsoring the site, try truncating the URL to its root address. This will tell you where the site is being hosted. For example, this site provides information on nutritional RDAs:

<http://www.mikeschoice.com/reports/rda.htm>.

If you truncate the URL to its root address <http://www.mikeschoice.com>, you will discover that this is a site selling a mineral supplement. Given the obvious bias, this is probably not the best source of nutritional information.

Another clue to what type of site you're looking at is whether there is a ~ (tilde) symbol in the URL. This symbol usually indicates that the site is a personal Web page and the information should be given careful scrutiny.

Comparison

Always compare the information that you find on a Web site with other information sources. Generally, you wouldn't want to use only Web sites as support for a research paper, so you would be looking at other types of sources such as books, magazine articles, etc. as well. How does the information found in the various formats compare?