

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: How to Evaluate Websites for Research

Although there is no guarantee that what you're seeing on a web page is valid, there are certain strategies you can use to be more certain. When deciding if you should use a website for your research, consider the following things:

DOMAIN

- a. What type of site is this?
- b. What can you tell by looking at the whole address?
- c. What is the purpose of this site (to entertain, inform, persuade, sell)?

AUTHORITY

- a. Who is the author / creator of this site (may be a person or group)?
- b. What are the author's qualifications? (check background info. if provided---or Google the name)
- c. Is contact information provided (name, e-mail, postal address, phone number)?
- d. Does this author (person or group) have a bias or slant?
- e. Are there ads? Do the ads make you suspicious of the information?

COVERAGE

- a. What is the focus of this site?
- b. Are there links to other reputable sites covering the same topic?
- c. Are there other resources listed (books, other authors, etc.)?
- d. Is there a "contents" or "site guide" that helps you navigate around the site?

CURRENCY

- a. When was the web page created (or copyrighted)?
- b. When was the page updated or modified?
- c. Is up-to-date information important for your topic?
- d. Can you find more current websites about your topic?

ACCURACY

- a. Is the material supported by information from other sites or sources (i.e. books)?
- b. Does the site appear to be academic (free from grammatical errors and conversational writing style---i.e. ALL CAPS, exclamation points, etc.)?
- c. Does it seem to be factual material, opinions, or a combination?
- d. Is there any small print that disclaims responsibility?
- e. Does the domain make you doubt how accurate the information is? If so, why?
- f. Is there anything that makes you doubt the information?