Evaluating Web-based Resources

What is a web site with academic content?
A web site that you choose as a college-level resource for information should provide you with unbiased, up-to-date material that can be validated. The books & periodicals accessible through your library have been carefully selected with you, the student doing academic research, in mind. What you find from a random internet search might not be. Identifying a web site that is of academic value is sometimes difficult. This handout is designed to help you decide what is best for your academic work.

What should I look for?
One of the first indicators of what a web site might contain is in its address, or URL. Every web site is assigned a domain (for example, the “com” in “dot com”). The domain in our URL (see above) is .edu because we are an educational institution. Some of the top-level domains are:
- .gov information is provided by a government agency (usa.gov)
- .us coming from a state agency in one of the fifty United States (ctdol.state.ct.us)
- .edu accredited, degree-granting educational institutions (nv.edu)
- .mil the armed forces (marines.mil)
- .org non-profit organizations, such as the American Red Cross (redcross.org)
- .net a network (citationmachine.net)
- .int international intergovernmental organizations, such as Interpol ( interpol.int)

For each web site: Examine carefully and evaluate these aspects:

- **authorship**: is the author or sponsor of the site qualified to publish in this field? Is the author’s education, experience, credentials, occupational title, or organizational affiliation, clearly stated? Can the information be verified? Is the material copyrighted? Can you contact the author to ask?

- **accuracy**: are sources of facts and statistics given? Does document have grammatical or spelling errors or appear otherwise unedited?

- **bias**: what is the function of this web site - to educate? to entertain? to broadcast personal opinions? to offer advice? Does it make claims for products that sound too good to be true? Does it take a side on a topic? Be sure you recognize the website for what it is. Look for information presented in an impartial and objective manner.

- **scope**: is this web site providing the whole picture, or a biased one (i.e. leaving out important data to slant your understanding of issue)? Is the information so specific and focused that it isn’t helpful to you? Does the site contain information appropriate for college-level research? You wouldn’t use a comic book as a resource; don’t use a website aimed at a juvenile audience.

- **currency**: does the web site have a recent “last updated” or copyright date? Are the facts & figures it publishes documented and dated? Or does it contain old, outdated information that should have been removed? Does it contain dead links that go nowhere?

- **format**: is the web the most appropriate manner in which to deliver this information? Perhaps the contents were originally published in another format, and this is merely a summary, or it may be missing essential tables, graphs or charts.

*over for more!*
Looking for journal articles on the Open Access Internet?

Even self-proclaimed peer-reviewed journal articles found via Open Access” (OA) on the Internet can be of questionable authenticity. NVCC’s library subscribes to thousands of journals of all kinds, from reputable publishers, via its subscription databases. Students can access articles on any topic, 24/7, via the Articles & Databases link from our homepage.

More information to look for when evaluating information:

- The web site is not trying to sell you a product or service, or convince you to join a group.
- The author’s e-mail or and/or other address or phone number is given, for your feedback or questions.
- Links (usually at the bottom of the main page) that say “About Us,” “Our Philosophy,” “Background,” “Biography,” “Mission” lead you to information about the producer of the site.
- Information is presented in a clear, clean, concise manner, is pleasing to the eye and to use. There shouldn’t be any spelling errors, typos or dead links (links that are outdated or lead nowhere). Information should be freely given.
- The site uses the Internet format to advantage; content is dynamic and up-to-date.
- Recognition or awards are given by an online reviewing agency.
- The information includes complete citations to sources.
- The site includes a text-only alternative for sight-challenged users.
- Links given in the site lead to other active web pages that add to your understanding of the subject.
- You’ve chosen the site because its information supports or disputes your arguments.

Most web sites offer easy access to related pages from links embedded in their text, or listed in bibliographies or directories. Be aware that while the original site may be academically worthy, the sites they link to may NOT be. You may be many pages distant from the one you started off on, when you finally do select a web site to use for an academic resource.

When researching health information, authenticity and timeliness are especially important! Go to quackwatch.com for more tips on recognizing fraud and misinformation in the health fields.

Contact the Reference Desk for help:
call us  203-575-8244
text us  203-951-8189
e-mail us  Library@nv.edu
chat with us at  nv.edu/library

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