



Web information is “buyer beware,” as there is no overall quality control. Keep in mind:

- Information on the Web is being **given away** – consider *why* it is free and who pays for the site.
- Reliable information exists on the Web; so do **spoof** sites, **counterfeit** sites, **propaganda** sites, and sites that are simply **inaccurate** or **outdated**, or full of **undocumented** assertions.
- “**Best bet**” Web sources include government agencies, news sites, professional societies, educational institutions, and reputable non-profit organizations. Out-of-copyright literary, historical, and scientific works are likely to be available; free access to recent, copyrighted books and scholarly articles is rare.

In evaluating information from a website, consider the same criteria as for published material:

- What is the **purpose** of the information? (inform, persuade, entertain, sell...)
 - Are sources of facts and assertions **documented**?
 - What are the author’s **qualifications** to write knowledgeably on this topic?
 - How might the information be **biased**?
 - Is the information **outdated**, or still relevant?
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Finding Citation Information for Webpages

Author

Look for a *byline* at the top or bottom of the document.

Look for a link such as “About Us,” “Contact,” etc. that may provide author information.

(Websites often neglect to provide author information for their material.)

Webpage Title

A webpage is a single document within a website (like an article within a magazine or journal).

No obvious title? Check the very top of the browser screen for a title (this comes from the HTML).

Website Title

To find the website title (if any), try truncating the URL to view the website homepage. (This may be the sponsor/host homepage, or it may be one of many websites supported by an organization.)

Ex.: “Assimilation Through Education: Indian Boarding Schools in the Pacific Northwest”

Webpage URL: <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/marr.html>

Truncate to <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw>

This website is titled *American Indians of the Pacific Northwest Collection*

Sponsoring / Host organization

The host or sponsoring organization for a website is analogous to the *publisher* of a print item.

To find the sponsor / host (if not obvious) try truncating the URL all the way back to the *domain* (.org, .com, etc). In the above example, truncate the URL to:

<http://content.lib.washington.edu> which is the University of Washington

Date: When was the information written/created? Look for a “Last Updated” note.

(This is another item frequently left out on web pages.)

Date Accessed: Remember to note this. (It usually appears on printouts from the Web.)

Evaluating Web Information

Purpose:

Consider, "*Why is this information being given away?*"

Is the information intended to inform? To persuade? To rant? To sell? To amuse? Is it satire?

If the purpose is not clear, look for "About Us," "Home," a mission statement, etc.

Does it seem to be written for some specific audience? Who?

Documentation:

Are sources cited for facts and assertions?

Unless you have good reason to trust the site, spot-check the documentation.

(Try EBSCO to verify an article; try SUMMIT to verify a book.)

Authority:

What qualifies the author(s) to write knowledgeably on this topic? Look for:

- **credentials** (degrees, certification, experience in the field, publications)
- **affiliations** with relevant institutions, organizations, or professional societies

Look for an "About" link, a homepage, and/or contact information.

Try a quick *Google* or EBSCO search on the person to verify that they are who they say they are!

Publisher/Host:

Is the document **self-published** (e.g., a personal page), or published by a company, organization, etc.?

What is the host organization's **mission**? This should be clearly stated on its website.

Look for an "About" link, a "mission" link, etc. (You may need to get to the homepage to find this.)

What is the **domain** of the host server? (.com, .edu, .gov, .org, .net, .mil, .info...)

This can be a clue about the host/sponsor, but is not definitive; it is not controlled.

Organizations may have their sites on a **.com** server, and names may be misleading.

(www.martinlutherking.org is a white supremacist website; www.whitehouse.org is a spoof site)

.net sites are housed on an ISP server; they are often – but not always – personal pages

Keep in mind that .edu sites may house student personal pages and assignments.

Are there ads? How do the ads relate to the site content? Is the site primarily a vehicle for advertising?

Date:

When was the information written/created? Look for a "Last Updated" note.

Is the information still relevant? How important is the creation date for your particular topic?

The Document Itself:

Is there a stated or apparent bias in the information?

Is the writing clear, and does it make sense?

How are the grammar and spelling? Sloppy writing probably indicates sloppy research.

More on evaluating websites: www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html