

Credible Sources Online

Because anyone can publish on the Internet, evaluating carefully whatever you find on the Web is a must. The burden is on you - the reader - to establish the validity, authorship, timeliness, and integrity of what you find. In the general World Wide Web there are no editors (unlike most print publications) to proofread and "send it back" or "reject it" until it meets the standards of a publishing house's reputation. Most pages found in general search engines for the web are self-published or published by businesses small and large with motives to get you to buy something or believe a point of view. Even within university and library web sites, there can be many pages that the institution does not try to oversee. *The web needs to be free like that!! And you, if you want to use it for serious research, need to question everything you find with critical thinking.*

Point of view or bias reminds us that information is rarely neutral. Because data is used in selective ways to form information, it generally represents a point of view. Every writer wants to prove his point, and will use the data and information that assists him in doing so. When evaluating information found on the Internet, it is important to examine *who* is providing the "information" you are viewing, and what might be their *point of view* or *bias*. The popularity of the Internet makes it the perfect venue for commercial and sociopolitical publishing. These areas in particular are open to highly "interpretative" uses of data.

Is it somebody's **personal page**?

- Read the **URL*** carefully:
 - Look for a personal name (e.g., *jbarker* or *barker*) following a tilde (~), a percent sign (%), or the words "users," "members," or "people."
 - Is the server a commercial **ISP*** or other provider mostly of web page hosting (like aol.com or geocities.com)?

Personal pages are not necessarily "bad," but you need to investigate the author very carefully. For personal pages, there is no publisher or domain owner vouching for the information in the page.

What type of **domain** does it come from ? (educational, nonprofit, commercial, government, etc.)

- Is the domain appropriate for the content?
 - Government sites: look for .gov, .mil, .us, or other country code
 - Educational sites: look for .edu
 - Nonprofit organizations: look for .org
- If from a foreign country, look at the country code and read the page to be sure who published it.

Look for appropriateness and fit. What kind of information source do you think is most reliable for your topic?

Information gathered at: <http://www.library.jhu.edu/researchhelp/general/evaluating/>
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>

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