



# ERC Quick Guide: Evaluating Websites

For your research to be **successful** it is critical to choose **reliable sources of information**. As the Internet is a self-publishing medium, many websites have not gone through any kind of editorial or peer review. Here are some criteria you can use to **evaluate information found on the Internet**.

## AUTHORITY

- Who is the author?
- What are the author's qualifications in this field? Qualifications might include educational credentials, previous writings, or experience. Biographical sources (*Who's Who in America*, *Biography Index*, *Current Biography*) or the document itself may provide this information.
- Is the author affiliated with an organization or institution? What are the purposes, goals, and reputation of the organization or institution?

## RELEVANCE

- Does the source contain the information you need? Is it an overview of the topic? Does it contain important details?
- What are the main points or concepts?

## CURRENCY

- Is there a copyright date?
- When was the information last updated?

## REFERENCES

- A bibliography can help you check validity and may lead to additional sources.
- Are there links to websites on the same topic? An absence of obvious links may indicate bad scholarship or hidden bias.



## PERSPECTIVE

- Why was the information published? Does the source show political or social bias from the author or publisher?

## AUDIENCE

- Who is the target audience? Children, laypersons, scholars, professionals? Is this appropriate for your purposes?
- The intended audience should be reflected in the author's writing style. A popular or layperson's source assumes the reader has no previous knowledge of the material. Watch for oversimplification. A scholarly source is written in the language or jargon of the field.

## VALIDITY

- Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda? Is more than one point of view presented?
- Is the information well researched and documented? How does the information compare with other sources on the same topic?
- What awards has the site received? Who issued the awards? These may indicate a biased or balanced website.

The **extension** is a quick way to identify an authoritative website, or to describe the intended audience of a site. Some common extensions include:

- .gov (Government) Includes official information from or about the U.S. government. *Example:* [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)
- .edu (Educational institution) Purpose is to educate or to provide information about an educational institution, such as a college, university or school. *Example:* [www.csc.edu](http://www.csc.edu)
- .org (Organization) Usually a non-profit organization, such as The American Cancer Society ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)). Sometimes contains information that promotes a specific point of view.
- .com (Commercial) Purpose is to sell goods or services, or to provide information about a company. *Example:* [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)
- .net (Network) Often, this includes personal web pages or community websites. *Example:* [www.madisonsoftball.net](http://www.madisonsoftball.net)

## ADDITIONAL SOURCES FOR EVALUATING WEBSITES

Auer, Nicole and Robert Sebek. Bibliography on Evaluating Web Information. 13 August 2004  
<<http://www.lib.vt.edu/help/instruct/evaluate/evalbiblio.html>>.

Beck, Susan. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: or, Why It's a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources. 14 April 2006. New Mexico State University Library. <<http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/eval.html>>. → *Interactive site to teach evaluation skills.*

Grassian, Esther. Thinking Critically about World Wide Web Resources. 13 June 2006. UCLA College Library <<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/index.htm>>.

Kirk, Elizabeth E. Evaluating Information found on the Internet. 1996. John Hopkins University. <<http://www.library.jhu.edu/researchhelp/general/evaluating/>>.

Ormondroyd, Joan, Michael Engle, and Tony Cosgrave. How to Critically Analyze Information Sources. 6 Oct. 2004. Cornell University Library. <<http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/skill26.htm>>.



### Questions? Ask a Librarian!

The Educational Resources Center (ERC) at Columbus State  
Columbus Hall

Reference Desk: 614.287.2460      Circulation Desk: 614.287.2464

<http://www.csc.edu/library>