

Module 9: Defining Your Path

Topic 2 Content: Evaluating a Website

Introduction

Evaluating a Website

Introduction

Using the World Wide Web to research a school project can provide you with very helpful information, but you have to know where to look. Evaluating each website is very important to make sure you find information that is valid and trustworthy. In this interactivity, click each of the numbers or use the previous and next buttons to view the five different criteria when you are evaluating a website's validity.



1 2 3 4 5

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Purpose

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Purpose

You must be sure you use legitimate websites. What is a legitimate website? First, websites are all identified by a URL. A URL is a specific line of text or characters that define the website's location or identity. You may have noticed that many websites share the same ending characters. View the image for more information on common website endings and extensions.

When you are researching a school project, you will want to limit the use of website endings with the extension .com. These sites can be set-up by anyone, so you must understand the purpose of the site. If you think you have found a valid .com website, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there advertisements on the website? Is the website trying to sell you a product?
- Is the website trying to persuade you to

Ending or Extension	Meaning	Purpose
.com	Commercial	These websites are for commercial use, they are trying to sell you something OR the owner of the website purchased the website address (or domain name).
.edu	Education	Indicates a school or institute of higher education (college or university).
.gov	U.S. Government Institution	Hosted by a United States government agency or sponsored group.
.mil	U.S. Military Organization	Hosted or sponsored by a United States military institution or installation.
.net	Internet Service Provider	A website run by a specific Internet service provider.
.org	Non-profit Organization	Sponsored by a nonprofit organizations, agencies, and/or associations.
- or % (used after an extension in a URL address)	Personal Website	These are personal websites. Be careful what research information you acquire from these sites.

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- Are there advertisements on the website? Is the website trying to sell you a product?
- Is the website trying to persuade you to change your mind?
- Who is the intended audience for this website?

Websites that end in .gov or .edu can usually be counted on to be relatively unbiased and credible. Databases are good choices, since most of these are maintained by reputable companies. Most public school and college libraries have links to databases from their library page. Also, most public libraries also subscribe to a variety of databases.

Module 9: Defining Your Path

Topic 2 Content: Evaluating a Website

Trustworthy

Evaluating a Website

Trustworthy

As you learned, anyone can publish a website. That means that, as you research, you have to identify the author, or webmaster, and find any contact information. You must make sure you can trust the author or webmaster of the website. You also want to make sure you are researching the most up-to-date information. Make sure you find the date of the last time the website was updated. The most current information is always best. Another great sign for credibility of a website is a listing of sites or other sources where the author found his or her information. You should expect a trustworthy site will cite their sources of information. When you are checking a website for validity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the author named, or is any contact information provided? This may be at the top or bottom of the page, or in a section



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- Is the author named, or is any contact information provided? This may be at the top or bottom of the page, or in a section titled “About Us” or “Contact Us.” Make sure to scan the perimeter of the website for additional links.
- Does the website provide the date when it was created?
- Is there a date that shows when the site and/or information was last updated?
- Does the website contain “broken links”? Broken links suggest that the website is not updated regularly.
- Does the information found seem to corroborate what you have already read on the subject?
- If there are links to other pages, are they also reliable sources?
- Is there a bibliography provided? Does the author cite his or her own sources?

Module 9: Defining Your Path

Topic 2 Content: Evaluating a Website


Objective Nature

Evaluating a Website

Objective Nature

There are plenty of biased websites that try to sell products, persuade audiences using speculation rather than facts, or urge you to take action for a cause. When you are evaluating a website for its objective, unbiased nature, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this website trying to sell something?
- Is the website non-biased?
- Is the author or organization presenting the information trustworthy? (This is a very important question. Ask yourself if the person or organization presenting the information is an expert in the area.)



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Module 9: Defining Your Path

Topic 2 Content: Evaluating a Website


The Author

Evaluating a Website

The Author

From whom exactly are you getting your information? When you use a book, you can easily identify the author. If the author was not an expert, would you still use him or her as a source? The author of the website should be an expert on the subject you are researching. To determine who the author is, look for credentials or links like “About Us,” “FAQs”, or “Background.” When you are evaluating the author, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it clear who the author is? Is it a person, an institution or an organization?
- Does the individual or organization list its qualifications or credentials?



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Appearance


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Appearance

Have you ever visited a website that was hard to navigate, looked sloppy, but contained a wealth of reliable information? Probably not. The appearance of a website can tell you a lot about its validity. Websites that are not set-up correctly will cause you to waste time while researching and will not contain valid, trustworthy information.

As simple as it may sound, the way a website looks can be a clue to the validity and reliability of the information found on it. For instance, if the website looks sloppy or is hard to navigate, this is a sign that it was not designed by a professional. This means the author may not have the qualifications or expertise that you need. When you are evaluating appearance, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the website free of grammar and spelling



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- Is the website free of grammar and spelling mistakes?
- Does the page require special software to view the information?
- Is the information free, or is there a charge to obtain the desired information?
- Is the website easy to navigate and easy to read (i.e., pages and links are clearly marked and there are no glaring color contrasts)?