

Module 3: MLA


Topic 2 Content: Criteria for Website Evaluation Notes

Introduction

Criteria for Website Evaluation

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While web-based resources can provide valuable information, it is important to take time to determine if the resource is truly one you should trust. Click on each of the icon buttons to view the five types of criteria you should use in evaluating a website's reliability and validity.



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Purpose

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Purpose

You should ask yourself, what is the overall purpose of the website? Looking at the actual URL of the website can help you determine its purpose. The URL, a specific string of characters, is the website's address on the Internet. Every website and webpage has a unique address. The specific extension or ending of a URL gives clues as to the real purpose of a website. For instance, if a website has a .com, this most likely means that the website has a commercial purpose or use, and may be trying to sell you something. Take a few moments to view a chart that outlines some other important types of websites.

When you are searching for information for a school project, try to limit the use of .com websites as much as possible. You want to try to access .edu, .gov, or .org sites because they tend to provide more reliable facts and statistics. Remember, any

Ending or Extension	Meaning	Purpose
.com	Commercial or Private	The owner of the website purchased the web address; the website may be trying to sell you something
.gov	U.S. Government	A U.S. government agency or sponsored group owns the web address
.edu	Educational Organization	A school, university, or college owns the web address
.mil	U.S. Military	The U.S. military or a sponsored group owns the web address
.net	Internet Service Provider	This is a website run by a specific internet provider
.org	Non-Profit Organization	The website is run by a non-profit organization

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When you are searching for information for a school project, try to limit the use of .com websites as much as possible. You want to try to access .edu, .gov, or .org sites because they tend to provide more reliable facts and statistics. Remember, any person can create a .com website, no matter their intentions. If you do need to use a .com website, however, make sure that you understand the intended purpose of that website. Ask the following questions:

- Is the website trying to sell you a product?
- Is the website trying to persuade you to do something or convince you to believe a certain idea?
- Who is the intended audience of this website?
- Are there advertisements on the page?

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Objectivity

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When you are searching for reliable information, you want to look for sites that are objective. This means that you want to make sure that there is no bias, or that the author is not presenting one side over another. If the information is presented in a way meant to persuade, you should question the validity:

- Is this website trying to sell something?
- Are both sides of the issue being fairly presented?
- 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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Authority

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The author of the information should be an authority, or expert, on the subject. To determine the author's expertise, look for information about the author's credentials in sections or links like "About us," "FAQs," "Biography," "Background," or something similar. You want to make sure that if you use the information from this site, you are adding to your own authority, not detracting from it. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is it clear who the author is? Is it a person, an institution or an organization?
- Is contact information, like name, address, email, and/or phone number, provided?
- Does the individual or organization list its qualifications or credentials?



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Accuracy and Timeliness

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Because any person can publish a website, you need to be able to identify the author, or webmaster and pertinent contact information. Information published anonymously is harder to verify. If you do not know the expertise or credentials of the author, how can you trust that you are not being misled? It is equally important that websites and information be updated regularly. When you are conducting research on current topics, you want the most current information or research. Information that is not dated is no better than anonymous information. You also want to look for a bibliography or listing of other sites and sources where the author found his or her information. Ask 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 title "About Us" or "Contact Us." Make sure to scan the perimeter of the website for additional links.



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Because any person can publish a website, you need to be able to identify the author, or webmaster and pertinent contact information. Information published anonymously is harder to verify. If you do not know the expertise or credentials of the author, how can you trust that you are not being misled? It is equally important that websites and information be updated regularly. When you are conducting research on current topics, you want the most current information or research. Information that is not dated is no better than anonymous information. You also want to look for a bibliography or listing of other sites and sources where the author found his or her information. Ask 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 title "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 its 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 with 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?

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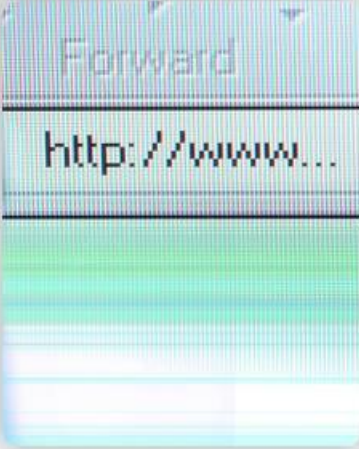
Appearance

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Appearance

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. Consider the following:

- 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? For example, are pages and links clearly marked and there are no glaring color contrasts?



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Summary

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Once you have applied these criteria to a website and the information that it contains, you will have a better idea of whether or not the information is valid. If you find the website is missing much of this information, or there are numerous mistakes in accuracy and grammar, you will want to look elsewhere for reliable sources. Remember, the quality of your resources can help or hurt the quality of your course.



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