

STOP!

Evaluate Websites Before Use.

AUTHOR

URL?
Who Are They?
Knowledgeable?
Contact Info?

PURPOSE

Whose site is it?
Lots of Ads?
What's the Mission?
Opinion or Fact?

CONTENT

Any Errors?
Enough Info?
Is it Real?
References?
Organized?
Date?

AUTHOR

Ask yourself...

Techniques to Try:

URL?

- Read the URL (web address) carefully. Personal pages are often identified by a ~ or %. They frequently are loaded on .edu or .com sites, like aol.com or geocities.com.
- Examine the domain to help you identify the type of organization that sponsors the site.
 - Educational: .edu, .museum
 - Government: .gov, .mil, .us, .int
 - Business-related: .com, .biz, .jobs, .mobi, .travel, .aero
 - Organization: .org, .coop, .info, .pro
 - Individuals: .name
 - Foreign: country codes, such as .ca, .fr, .jp, .uk

Who Are They?

- Click on links within the site (About, About Us, FAQs, Who am I, Our Company, Home) to identify the sponsor.

If no links are available, truncate back the web address.
~~http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/index.html~~
- Copyright statements © can be found at the bottom of a page.
- Search “Whois” (whois.domaintools.com or www.betterwhois.com) to determine who owns the site.

Knowledgeable?

- “Google It!” Google the sponsor’s name or site to locate additional information about them, such as where they work, where they went to school, types of things they research, what others think of them.
- Use Google’s link-back feature to find other pages that link to the site.

- Look up a “review” of the sponsor or site in a reputable directory, such as: Librarian Internet Index (<http://lii.org>)
Infomine (<http://infomine.ucr.edu>)
- Search for newspaper articles on the sponsor through the PC Library [Online Newspaper Databases](#).
- Search for formally published articles by the author through the PC [Library Online Article Databases](#).

Contact Info?

- Click on links within the site (Contact, Contact Us, Help, About, About Us) to identify individuals responsible for the site.
- Look for an author’s email address or rollover an author’s name to check for a hotlink.

PURPOSE

Ask yourself...

Techniques to Try:

Whose site is it?

- Confirm the source! Purpose is often driven by the organization or person putting up the site.

Lots of Ads?

- Look for advertisements and pop-ups. An abundance of advertising can be associated with sites with one purpose— making money!

What's the Mission?

- Click on links within the site ([About](#), [About Us](#), [Our Vision](#), [Mission](#), [Home](#)) to find out the purpose of the site. Why did the author build this website? Is it to sell you something? Promote their opinion?

Opinion or Fact?

- Think about the “tone” of the page. “Tones” that sound humorous, exaggerated, or outrageous often indicate sites meant to amuse.
- Compare the amount of opinions versus factual information. Sites with a lot of opinions frequently are trying to persuade.

CONTENT

Ask yourself...

Techniques to Try:

Any Errors?

- Look for spelling and grammatical mistakes, which can be clues that the information is inaccurate.
- Consider the “tone” of the page. Outlandish “tones” may contain inaccurate information just to be entertaining.

Enough Info?

- Read through the content to check if the information is providing enough detail and answering all of your questions.
- If the information is not in-depth enough, look for a book on the topic through the [Library Catalog](#) or an article through the [Library Article Databases](#).

Is It Real?

- Keep an eye out for outrageous photographs or unlikely images, which are typically used in satirical or parody sites.
- Determine if the information matches what you already know about the topic.
- Check the accuracy of the information against other sources, such as books, articles, or other websites.
- Identify the “Author” using the techniques in this handout. Accuracy of the information is closely linked to authority.
- Look for the HON Code when searching for medical information. If this code is on the website, it means that the site was approved as credible medical information on the web. 

References?

- Check for footnotes, references or a bibliography, usually at the bottom of a webpage. Web content that is documented, especially with scholarly journals or books, is often accurate.
- Beware of fake references. Try to locate at least one of the references.
- Look for “links,” “additional sites,” “related links” from the webpage. Links that work and go to reliable websites usually indicate quality content.

Organized?

- Try navigating through the site by clicking on the links. Sites where you can’t move around easily usually are no longer being maintained and may contain outdated or inaccurate information.
- Look for a search box on the homepage of the site. Quality sites usually allow you to search on your topic specifically within their site.

Date?

- The date can usually be found toward the very top or very bottom of the page. Undated factual or statistical information is useless.
- Make sure that the date is attached to the actual content you are viewing - - not just a date for the homepage of the organization. “Last Updated” dates might indicate only a minor change, such as a spelling correction.
- Copyright © dates often indicate the first year the website was published not the date of the content. Look for other more recent dates on the webpage.
- Beware of automated dates. Sometimes the date is automatically reset to “today’s date” instead of the date of the content.
- How important is the date to your topic? Certain subjects like science, medicine, & current events (news) change frequently. For these subjects, you typically need current information.