

Evaluating a website: It *looks* true, but...

The Internet offers an enormous amount of information, but it comes with a cost: anybody can put up information on the web regardless of whether it's true or not. The guidelines below offer some information on how to identify the bias of a particular website.

Sponsorship

It's important to know who's responsible for the creation of a particular website. Be sure to look for links such as "About Us", "Background", copyright notices, or corporate logos.

Authority

On the same note, check to see who wrote the article. Is it a single person, or is the article unsourced? Does the person writing mention any credentials or special training in the field that they're discussing?

Accuracy

If you're not sure whether or not a particular piece of information is correct, it's worth your time to check it against a different source—for instance, if Wikipedia says one thing, then it's worth seeing if the Encyclopedia Britannica agrees.

Citations

Well-written articles will usually have citations at the bottom of a page to indicate where the information was found. You can use these footnotes to broaden your research.

Timeliness

It's worth your time to see how old the information is, as many webpages are updated once and then never again. Information that's out of date is frequently incorrect.

Objectivity

While some information is written with a careful eye towards keeping it neutral, other websites will frequently present information that's slanted to fit a particular bias. It's easy to get only one side of the story from a single source, because the source will remove information that doesn't promote its cause. Again, cross-checking information can help to identify this bias.

Remember that the Sowela Library & Learning Resource Center
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