!Warning: This website may be hazardous to your grade!
Evaluating web sites for academic research

Use these guidelines when determining the reliability of a webpage for research:

1) What type of site is it? It’s helpful to know where the authors are coming from:
   - Popular (slick, 2nd or 3rd hand information; main purpose to entertain or promote a viewpoint)
   - Substantive (News or General Interest (general info, appealing to broad audience))
   - Scholarly (author is credible; bibliography present; language academic/technical)
   - Sensational (language is elementary, inflammatory, or sensational)

2) Authority with regard to topic—who is responsible for the site?
   - Author of site (individual/institutional affiliation, organization)
   - Credentials, expertise, experience in subject matter
   - Contact information provided (name, e-mail, postal address)
   - URL type may suggest reputable affiliation or commercial interests (.edu=educational institution; .org=non-profit organization; .com=commercial enterprise; .net=Internet Service Provider; .gov=governmental body; .mil=military)
   - When in doubt about sponsorship, look up the site on www.easywhois.com.

3) Objectivity—what is the purpose of the site? Does it push any particular viewpoint?
   - Check the statement of purpose/scope, and disclosure of sponsorship (look for “about us”), in addition to any “hidden” biases evident through your critical reading of text, or independent research done on the organization or author.
   - Who is the intended audience?
   - Information presented as factual or opinion, primary or secondary in origin?
   - Criteria given for inclusion of information?

4) Accuracy—how accurate is the information?
   - Facts documented or well-researched
   - Facts compare to related print or other online sources
   - Links provided to quality Web resources

5) Currency—when was the information posted and/or written?
   - Evidence of current content
   - Pages date-stamped with latest update

6) Usability—is the site well designed and stable?
   - Site organization logical and easy to maneuver with links back to home page
   - Content readable by intended audience
   - Information presented is error-free (spelling, punctuation)

Adapted from: “Criteria for Evaluating Web Resources”. Kent State University Libraries

Prepared by Iowa City Library, Kirkwood Community College, Oct. 2010 refdesk@kirkwood.edu (319) 887-3612
Information you need to cite an Internet source (bibliography):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of site</th>
<th>URL (website address)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Center for Public Integrity</td>
<td><a href="http://www.publicintegrity.org">http://www.publicintegrity.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APA Format Example:
When you have used links from a Home Page to get to the site you used, use the URL of the Home Page.


MLA Format Example:
If your instructor asks you to include the URL, place it after the date accessed inside angle brackets < >.

Author. “Title of page.” *Title of site if different*. Publisher or sponsor. Date of Site. Web. Date accessed. <url optional>.


Tips on Effective Web Searching (for more ideas, see www.googleguide.com)

- Use quotation marks when searching for a phrase, such as “global warming”
- (minus sign) works like NOT, excluding pages with the word that follows from results. Example: +pollution -air
- * When searching for a person’s name or a partial quote, an asterisk will search for a quote with missing words, such as “wherefore * romeo” or “william * macy”
- site: or ~site: On google.com, use the site limit to narrow your results. Examples: depression treatment site:edu will show results only on .edu sites; “prescription drugs” ~site:com will show results from any site except a .com.

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