



# Evaluating Websites

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## About This Guide

Although there is no exact science to website evaluation, this guide provides some of the criteria you may wish to consider.

## Difficulties with Evaluating Websites

Evaluating a website can be a complicated process. Items in the library are usually easier to evaluate, because they have already been reviewed twice by the time you see them. First, an editor verifies that the information is accurate. Second, a librarian determines whether the item is appropriate for the collection. Freely-available resources on the World Wide Web usually do not pass through this review process.

## Understanding Top-Level Domain Names

Most URLs include the name and type of organization sponsoring the page. The type of organization is identified by a three-letter code called a "top-level domain name." Below are some of the most common domains you will find:

### **.edu--educational institution**

Even though a page comes from an educational institution, it does not mean the institution endorses the views expressed there. Students or faculty members may publish personal pages.

### **.com--commercial entity**

Many companies advertise and sell products, as well as publish annual reports and other company information for their customers, stockholders, and potential investors on the Web. Some information may be available for a fee.

### **.gov--federal government**

Government agencies use the Web to publish legislation, census information, weather data, tax forms, and many other documents.

### **.org--non-profit organization**

Non-profit organizations use the Web to promote their causes. These are good sources to use when comparing different sides of an issue, but be aware of biased information. (Not all .org sites are non-profits.)

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## Librarian Selected Websites

For librarian selected websites in your area of study, please visit the Research/Subject Guides available through the Library's website ([www.chapman.edu/library](http://www.chapman.edu/library)). To access, simply click "Research / Subject Guides" under "Research." View the "Internet Guides" tab within most guides for a list of websites.

## Criteria for Evaluating Websites

The following table provides criteria for website evaluation.

<b>1</b> Content / Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the author easy to identify? Credible?</li><li>• Does the author document experience and expertise on the subject?</li><li>• Does the site represent specific groups or organizations?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is important to identify the organization that is sponsoring the site, and any hidden agendas in the material presented.</li><li>• Be cautious of sites that have a tilde (~) in the URL, because the information provided in these sites may not be sanctioned by the parent organization.</li></ul>
<b>2</b> Purpose / Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the material provided of a scholarly or popular nature?</li><li>• Whom is the site intended for? For students, scholars, or peers?</li><li>• Is there a use of offensive language or terms?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A good indicator of a site <i>not</i> intended for scholarly is the use of advertised products for sale.</li><li>• The appropriate style, content and language will also aid in your evaluation.</li><li>• Bias may be most evident when researching topics dealing with issues of gender, sexuality, and race.</li></ul>
<b>3</b> Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How focused is the subject?</li><li>• How does it compare to other sources on the subject?</li><li>• Is there is list of related sources, bibliography or webliography? Is the list biased?</li><li>• Is the material presented for a narrow audience (scholarly) or for a more general audience (non-scholarly)?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If important information, such as dates and events, has been omitted, there may be an issue in how the arguments and conclusions are presented.</li><li>• The inclusion of URLs with a bias may reflect upon the site.</li></ul>
<b>4</b> Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When was the material last updated? Are the most recent editions of materials cited included?</li><li>• Are old sources used to reinforce outdated arguments?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A site's copyright or most recent revision date is usually located at the bottom of the page.</li><li>• Abandoned sites may not include the latest scholarly works.</li></ul>
<b>5</b> Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the source citations accurate and verifiable?</li><li>• If there are links to other sites, are they appropriate, current, and useful?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A good indicator of a problematic site is the absence of documented sources.</li></ul>

Information in the above table was compiled from "Evaluating Web Sites: What to Look For" in Trinkle, Dennis A., and Scott A. Merriman, eds. *The History Highway: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Guide to Internet Resources*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.

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