Why you must question the information you find on the Internet!

As we all know, there is a huge variety of information available on the internet. It is a valuable source of information in our everyday lives but is it any good for scholarly research?

While some internet content is useful for your researching your assignments, a great deal of it is of poor quality and unreliable. **How can you tell the good content from the bad? Use the following 5 evaluation criteria each and every time you retrieve information from the internet for scholarly use.**

### Accuracy

**WHO WROTE THE WEBPAGE? WHAT WAS HIS/HER PURPOSE IN WRITING IT?**

- Is the **author** clearly identifiable from the webpage?
- Does he/she have any **qualifications on the topic**?
- Are there any **contact details** given for the author?

*If ‘NO’ is the answer to the three questions above, then the webpage is probably not suitable for academic research purposes.*

### Authority

**WHO PUBLISHED THE WEBPAGE? IS HE/SHE QUALIFIED TO WRITE ON THIS TOPIC?**

- Is the article published by a **reliable institution**, e.g. a government department, an academic institution, a recognised non-governmental organization (NGO) such as Amnesty International?
- Does the publisher/writer list his/her **qualifications** and/or **any other publications**?

*If ‘NO’ is the answer to the two questions above, then the webpage is probably not suitable for academic research purposes.*

### Website Addresses & Reliable Domain Names

The **domain name** of a website indicates whether the website is a recognised institution or not. For example, only a recognised educational or research institution in the UK can use the domain ‘ac.uk’

**DOMAINS & THEIR MEANINGS**

- **.com** = commercial organisation
- **.edu** = educational institution
- **.gov** = government dept of the U.S.A.
- **.org** = non-profit organisation

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**Objectivity**

**WHAT WAS THE AUTHOR’S OBJECTIVE IN WRITING THE ARTICLE?**

**DOES THE AUTHOR OR PUBLISHER HAVE A STRONG BIAS ON THE TOPIC?**

**IS THE ARTICLE BACKED UP BY REFERENCES TO OTHER RESEARCH OR IS IT OPINION BASED?**

- Is the website or author trying to sell the reader something, e.g. a pharmaceutical company?
- Does the website or writer has a strong bias, e.g. an extremist political ideology?

*If ‘YES’ is the answer to the two questions above, then the webpage is probably not suitable for academic research purposes.*

**Currency**

**WHEN WAS THE ARTICLE WRITTEN?**

**IS THE WEBSITE UPDATED REGULARLY?**

- Does the article or webpage have any ‘last updated’ information?
- Is new content regularly added to the website?
- Are the links within the article or webpage still active?

*If ‘NO’ is the answer to the three questions above, then the webpage is probably not suitable for academic research purposes.*

**Coverage**

**IS THE INFORMATION PRESENTED REFERENCED AND CITED FULLY?**

**DOES THE WEBPAGE PRESENT AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE TOPIC?**

**IS THE INFORMATION PRESENTED IN A READABLE FORMAT?**

- Is all the information presented freely or do you have to pay to access the full article?
- Do you require extra software to view the webpage and its content in full?
- Is it all images or a balance of text and images?

*If ‘YES’ is the answer to the three questions above, then the webpage is probably not suitable for academic research purposes.*

**Source**