Evaluating websites

Is the site I’m looking at OK to use?

Of course you may use information from internet websites but beware! Anyone can write a web page or post any information to it for any purpose at any time.

It is down to you to assess its quality and integrity.

Even if you don’t have much time it is useful to bear in mind the following questions to help you evaluate websites.

1. Who is the information provider? Is it the government, a non-governmental organization, a firm, etc?
2. Is the provider likely to be a reliable source of this information?
3. Why is the information provided? Is the website’s aim to inform, to sell, or to promote a particular point of view?
4. When was the site last updated? – Can you see a date on the page?

If you do have a bit more time then it might be useful to consider the following issues:

Scope - What is the purpose of the site - education, advertising, entertainment? Read the "About us" or “Frequently Asked Questions” section if there is one.

Breadth - What aspects of the subject are covered? Is the resource focused on a narrow area or does it include related topics?

Depth - What level of detail is provided about the subject? This may depend on the audience for which the resource has been designed.

Content - Is the information fact or opinion? Does the site contain original information or simply links?

Completeness - How comprehensive is the website? Is it well researched, with bibliographies and references? Is there any archival information?

Sources - Are sources for factual information listed so they can be verified?

Uniqueness - What advantages does this particular resource have over others focusing on a similar topic?

Links - Are the links kept up to date and to appropriate resources? The proportion of links working may help indicate a well-maintained site.
**Writing** - Is the information free of grammatical, spelling and other errors?

**Purpose** - What is its purpose? Is it clearly stated? Is it objective or biased? Is the level of bias acceptable?

**Authority** - What is the authority, expertise or credentials of the author? Who is hosting the site? Check the web address for clues: e.g. .ac.uk is the code for a UK university which is likely to make this a trustworthy site. Government sites can be recognised by .gov - once again a reliable source. Charities, societies, pressure groups often have .org in their address. Although reliable, please remember these sites are likely to be biased towards their cause. Commercial sites are likely to be .co or .com and information on these sites may not be as reliable. A ~ sign in a web address usually indicates a personal website, so care may need to be taken in using this material.

**Currency** - When was it last revised? Good sites should display a creation or revision date. These give an indication of the site's durability.

**Further Resources**
There are a number of websites that give guidance on evaluating web sites. This is a useful one:
- Evaluating Internet Research Sources by Robert Harris
  http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm

**Contact us**

**For an appointment or further advice:**

- **Phone:** 01785 295750
- **Email:** ask@staffs.ac.uk
- **Visit:** Skills Spaces: Thompson Library, Stoke OR Blackheath Lane, Stafford

Additional resources are available the website at:  http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk

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