

Evaluating a Website

What is a web site with academic content?

An academic web site should provide you with unbiased, up-to-date information that can be validated. Unlike the carefully selected books & periodicals in our library, Internet web sites that result from a random search often have little or no value as academic resource material at the college level. Finding a web site that *is* of academic value is sometimes difficult. This handout is designed to help you in that process.

What should I look for?

One of the first indicators of what a web site might contain is in its address, or URL. Every web site is assigned a domain (for example, the “com” in “dot com”). The domain in our URL (see above) is **.edu** because we are an **educational** institution.

.gov	indicates information is provided by government agencies, such as the FBI.
.edu	indicates an accredited, degree-granting educational institution
.mil	indicates the armed forces
.org	indicates non-profit organizations, such as the Red Cross

For each web site: Examine carefully and evaluate these aspects:

- **authorship:** is the author or sponsor of the site qualified to publish in this field? Is the author’s education, experience, credentials, occupational title, or organizational affiliation, clearly stated? Can this information be verified? Is the material copyrighted? Can you contact the author to ask questions?
- **accuracy:** are sources of facts and statistics given? Does document have grammatical or spelling errors or appear otherwise unedited?
- **bias:** what is the function of this web site - to educate? to entertain? to broadcast personal opinions? to offer advice? to sell goods or services? Be sure you recognize it for what it is, and make sure you indicate its function in your paper.
- **scope:** is this web site providing the whole picture, or a biased one (i.e. leaving out important data to slant your understanding of issue)? Does this site contain information appropriate for college-level research? You wouldn’t use a comic book as a resource; don’t use a website aimed at a juvenile audience.
- **currency:** does the web site have a recent “last updated” or copyright date? Are the facts & figures it publishes documented and dated? Or does it contain old, outdated information that should have been removed? Does it contain dead links that go nowhere?
- **format:** is the web the most appropriate manner in which to deliver this information? Perhaps the contents were originally published in another format, and this is merely a summary, or it may be missing essential tables, graphs or charts.

More good things to look for:

- The author's e-mail or and/or other address or phone number is given, for your feedback or questions.
- Links that say "**About Us**," "**Our Philosophy**," "**Background**," "**Biography**," "**Mission**" lead you to information about the producer of the site.
- Information is presented in a clear, clean, concise manner, is pleasing to the eye and to use. There shouldn't be any spelling errors, typos or dead links (links that are outdated or lead nowhere).
- The site uses the Internet format to advantage; content is dynamic and up-to-date.
- Recognition or awards are given by an online reviewing agency.
- The information includes a bibliography or webliography with complete citations to sources.
- The site includes a text-only alternative for sight-challenged users.
- Links given in the site lead to other active web pages that add to your understanding of the subject.
- You've chosen the site because its information supports or disputes your arguments.

Most web sites offer easy access to related pages from links embedded in their text, or listed in bibliographies or directories. Be aware that while the original site may be academically worthy, the sites they link to may NOT be. You may be many pages distant from the one you started off on, when you finally do select a web site to use for an academic resource.

Several of the databases NVCC subscribes to have links to academic resources that have been evaluated by editors and found academically worthy.

Database

Business & Company Resource Center
Facts.com
Health & Wellness Resource Center
Opposing Viewpoints
SIRS Knowledge Source

How to Find the Links

Company Profiles include links to corporate homepages
Issues & Controversies files contain Contact Information
Click "Links to Other Sites" for online medical resources
Search by topic, then click "Web Sites" tab
Click Topic Browse & select topic from Internet Sites *OR*
search by topic and choose "WebSelect Sites" from the
resource headings



The NVCC library's Online Catalog now includes titles of credible web sites.

Ask a librarian for help whenever needed.