

Name: _____ Date: _____

Research Guide: Assessing Sources

Evaluating the credibility and validity of a resource can be very difficult, particularly when doing research using the Internet. Below are some basic guidelines to help you select reliable resources and use those to learn accurate information about a given subject.

Characteristics of Reliable Sources

Authority: Who is sponsoring the information? The URL can provide information about the origin of the resource. The following are examples of ways you can determine the type of organization that is sponsoring the content for a specific website

Sites ending in....

.edu are usually educational institutions and generally a good source of information.

.gov are government websites and usually good sources for statistical information

.org are typically non-profit organizations often set up as a public service. Be on the lookout for political agendas and biases.

Example: If you are looking for information about gun control, then you might check .gov sites for statistics related to gun ownership, laws, etc. Sites affiliated with specific biases on gun ownership will probably be listed a .org sites (handguncontrol.org or nrahg.org)

Blogs

While interesting, these are usually not fact-based and as a general rule should not be used for conducting research

Online magazines or journals

These articles often contain a detailed bibliography and site specific resources as evidence for claims and statistics

Online news sources

Virtually every network and cable news station has an online site as do local affiliates. It is important to realize that while they do provide news, they are also involved in the entertainment industry and may present some information that is opinion vs. fact-based.

Television/Internet video news broadcasts

When viewing video, keep in mind that if it is not from a source that can be accurately documented with origin, date, and key information like who, what, when, where, why and how, then the source may not be credible.

- Accuracy:** Sources for the factual content on the site are clear. There is someone verifying the accuracy of the information being presented. Verify the author's credentials.
- Example:** Dr. Robert Green is cited as a physician who was in charge of a study that produced specific results or the Center for Disease control provided certain statistical data.
- Objectivity:** The content is provided for public service or educational use. These sites usually provide links to additional information and are free of advertising for products related to the topic.
- Timeliness:** The date of the information and/or the last update is clearly stated on the page.