

How to Tell a Reliable Web Site

By James Krauss

Doing research, for whatever reason, is a lot easier now than it was thirty, twenty or even ten years ago because of the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web. There are an untold number of web sites out there with information available that a researcher only ten years ago would have loved to get his or her hands on. However, because of the make-up of the Internet and the free access to posting information on it, there are also a countless number of sites with a lot of misinformation that a researcher could misinterpret. Therefore, how do we separate the wheat from the chaff? How do we get the correct information and discard the trash?

I became involved with the Internet about 1990 and started to teach the building of web sites and doing research on the Internet since about 1998. What I am listing below is what I have taught through the years to my students, using the Internet as a research tool.

1. **Reliable Organization:** There are professional organizations, no matter what subject you are trying to research, which have web sites that deal with the subject matter. These sites are always a good place to start your research. These sites also will connect you to other sites having to do with the subject matter.
2. **Web site appearance:** If the web site you go to, comes up too flashy be suspicious. Extremes of “cuteness,” “drabness,” “goriness” or “special effects” are a give-away that the designer is trying to draw your attention away from the information and to wow you with the design.
3. **Sources Cited:** Any good web site will cite where they got their information. If you cannot find citations in the web site do not trust it. If you find something that you are interested in look for it in multiple other sites.
4. **Author Citations:** A site given real information should have the names of whoever, wrote the information, who designed the site and the sponsoring organization. If they do not have this information they are trying to hide something. Also you will need that information for your citations in your work.
5. **Frequent Up-dates:** The site should be visited by the Author/Organization on a regular schedule for up-dates and to check things over. These dates should be posted somewhere on the site. This is something, you will also need for you own citations.
6. **Grammar:** The site should be grammatically correct with no spelling mistakes. This is a big tip off when a site should not be trusted.
7. **Cross Reference:** Do not depend on only one site for your information. Before you take any bit of information as gospel, you should find it on several sites not just one. If the information is not found on any other site it should be treated as suspicious.

These are but a few suggestions as to if a web site is reliable or not. Always remember that the Internet is a great source of information but because of the openness of the Internet there is a lot of misinformation out there also. Be sure to check you sources all the time.

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