Evaluate the Authority of a Web Resource

Evaluating the authority of a web page or website is the primary criteria necessary for selecting credible resources.

Find out who is responsible for a site by locating answers to the questions below.

NOTE: The more difficult it is to find information about the author and/or the source of a site, the more reservations you should have about using it.

**Authorship**

- Is it easy to identify who is responsible for the contents of the site?
- Is the web page signed?
- Is there a way to locate information about the author’s expertise or credentials?
- If so, does the author show expertise relating to the subject matter presented?

*If you answered “NO” to any of the above questions, here are a few more questions you should ask.*

- Are the author’s other qualifications available on the web page?
- Are there links to biographical information or other documents containing information about the author?
- Does the site that linked you to this one provide information about this page’s author?
- Did you link from a site you trust?
- Is there an email address available from which you can request academic or professional background?
- Is the author affiliated with an educational institution, a reputable organization or the government?

**Sponsor / Publisher**

- Can you identify the sponsor of the site? (The sponsor and author may not be the same)
- Is the sponsor reliable?
- Does this site reside on a person internet account or is it part of an official site?

*If you have difficulty answering some of the questions listed above or want more information about a site, the next page will provide some strategies.*
Strategies

If you’re having difficulty locating information about a webpage author or source, try the following strategies:

- Look for a link, an email address, postal address or telephone number from which you can request information about the author or sponsor.
- Check the header, footer, watermark or wallpaper for information that might provide clues. It may be part of an official academic or scholarly site. It may not.
- Try contacting the webmaster of the site. Ask questions.
- If the webpage is part of a larger site, you may be able to use the internal search engine or directory to search for the author’s name.
- Using an internet search engine like Google, search for the author’s name as a phrase. Example: “Andrew Weil”
- Notice the URL, the site’s web address - .edu is for education sites; .com is for commercial sites; .org is technically for nonprofit organizations; .gov is a government site; .mil is a military site; .net identifies a network
- .edu sites will probably provide research quality resources and information as well as dependable links but they may also include individual home pages of people affiliated with the institution. Individual homepages are usually not officially endorsed by the institution.
- The tilde ~ in a website’s url or address is sometimes an indication of a personal page. In any case, it shows the site is probably part of a larger entity.

If you are satisfied with the information you’ve located on the author and/or source, you probably want to consider other evaluation criteria like the following:

Accuracy

  Verify the information with other reputable sources
  Take note if there are spelling or grammatical errors

Objectivity / Bias

  Be aware of the viewpoint(s) of a page or site
  Sometimes sites are created to appear objective but are in fact heavily biased or hoax sites

Currency or Timeliness

  The date signifying when a page was updated can be an indication of recent revision.
  Take note of references within the content to indicate currency.