

One of the main problems with the public Internet is determining the validity of the information obtained because anyone can establish a website and produce a web page. To help you differentiate good from bad information, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the source of the information?
 - a. An address ending with .edu is from an institution of higher education. This information is probably accurate, particularly if it is part of the official information put out by the institution. Information produced by a faculty member or student could contain varying degrees of bias.
 - b. An address ending with .gov is from some branch of the federal government. This information will probably be accurate.
 - c. An address ending with .org is from a nonprofit organization. The accuracy of this information will depend on the organization. You can rely on information from organizations such as the American Educational Research Association. But other organizations might have a specific agenda and provide biased information. You need to look at the mission of the organization to assess the accuracy of the information.
 - d. An address ending with .com is from a commercial vendor or a private individual. The accuracy of at least some of the information from a commercial vendor should always be suspect because a profit motive typically drives the information provided. The intentions of private individuals can vary, so the information on their pages should be handled with care also.
 - e. An address ending with .net is from anyone that can afford to pay for the space on a server. Information from this source is the most suspect because it can come from anyone.
 2. What is the purpose of the web page? Is it a public service, sales, educational, editorial, etc. web page? The purpose of the web page may suggest the type of bias that may exist in the information presented.
 3. Does the information display or present information that is traceable to factual information presented in some bibliographic or internal reference? Information that does would appear to be accurate.
 4. Is there some acknowledgement of the limitations of the information particularly if the information is a report of some data or study? Such acknowledgements suggest accuracy.
 5. Does the web page state when it was last revised? This will give some information about its currency.
 6. Is the information appropriate for your purpose? In other words, is the information scholarly, trade, or popular information? For a research study, you would want scholarly information.
-