

Why evaluate?

Unlike library resources that have been carefully selected by professionals, the information that you find on the internet may not be suitable for academic purposes. This means that you need to critically evaluate what you find before you use it.

Criteria for evaluating

You need to consider six important criteria before you decide to use a website in your research. This mnemonic is an easy way to remember these criteria:

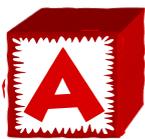


So before you cite a website in your research, ask yourself: 'Could this be a BAD URL?'



is for Bias

Bias is a slant towards a particular point of view. Check the page for evidence of bias, such as language that tries to sway your opinion. Think about what motivated the author to create the page. Are they trying to inform and explain; or are they trying to rant, rave, sell, persuade, or entice? Is the author connected to an organisation that might influence their treatment of the topic? Are alternative views considered? Has anything been deliberately left out? A good site will be fair, balanced, and objective.



is for Authority

Who created the page? Look for names of people with authority in the subject, not just organisations. What makes the author an expert? What else have they written? Are they affiliated with a university, business, or organisation? Check the associated site to confirm their status. Do they provide any contact details? Look them up in a library database or Google Scholar to see what else they have written and if others have cited them.



is for Date

Are you looking for current information? There should be a date on the page (date created, published, modified, updated, or revised). If you can't find a date, be wary! To check when a page was last modified, type: `javascript:alert(document.lastModified)` in the web address bar. Some search engines (<http://gigablast.com>) tell you when a page was published or modified.



U is for URL

The URL can tell you a lot about a site. A person's name or a tilde (~) symbol in the URL indicates a personal site. Look at the domain name (the first part of the URL between http:// and the next /). What does it end with?

Domain	Type of site
.edu or .ac	Educational or academic institution
.org	Non-profit organisation
.gov or .govt	Government site
.com or .co	Commercial site
.net	A site hosted by an Internet Service Provider (ISP)

Academic or educational sites are more likely to be reliable for academic research. However, academics sometimes post material on other domains (e.g. .com or personal pages). Truncate the URL by deleting everything after the first slash (/) symbol (see screenshot below) to see what site is hosting the page.

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R is for Relevance

Is the site actually relevant to your research topic? Consider the level of information required. Who is the site aimed at (children, consumers, the general public, students, academics, experts)? Oversimplified or generalised information may not be appropriate if you are writing for an expert or academic audience.



L is for Links

Do all of the links work? Dead links indicate a poorly maintained site. Links to poor quality sites weaken the pages credibility. Look for links to reliable supporting evidence and quality sources. Do other reputable sites provide links to the site that you are evaluating? To find out, go to Google and type **link:** followed by the URL of the site you are evaluating (e.g. **link:http://www.otago.ac.nz/library**). Are they quality sites? If you don't find any links, the site may be very new, or it may not be well thought of by other experts.