

Writing Activity

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The Information Age has allowed us countless venues of information - as fast as our fingers can type. So how do you know whether a source is credible or not? Which sites are appropriate for including in academic papers and assignments?

This assignment is designed to help you differentiate between a credible source and one that is not.

So how do you know the difference between a website that is credible and one that is quackery? Firstly, many research papers, projects and essays will require you to look up scholarly journal sources. These will be best researched by using your school's library. A librarian will be able to help you access an electronic database which will direct you to articles from scholarly journals. Often times, an instructor will also allow the inclusion of online sources, as long as they are reliable. Knowing how to detect this is vital.

An easy way to remember is to refer to the 5 **W**'s.

Who is writing this information? Can you find information about the author(s) or contributors to the site? Is the author an expert in the field? For example, if you are reading a website about herbal cold remedies and the person writing the article is a doctor, but as you look deeper you realize her doctorate is in mathematics.

Where is the information appearing? To assess this look at ending of the web address (what comes after the dot). A ".edu" is a website that is put out by an educational institution, a ".gov" from the government and a ".org" from an organization. Where there may be some sources from these addresses that are not credible, most will be (.orgs however are likely the least reliable of the three so do your homework). Most of these sources have to be evaluated by governing boards or other institutions and therefore generally provide reliable information. Websites that end in a ".com" and ".net" are websites that can be purchased by anyone, including individuals and commercial vendors. No one evaluates these sites and they can be completely erroneous. This is not to say there aren't reliable ".com" or ".net" sites, but they do need to be scrutinized for credibility.

When was the information last updated? Generally this information can be found at the bottom of the webpage. Information should be updated recently.

Why is this website operating? Is it providing a public service to inform the population or is it trying to sell a product and make money? When money is the motivator, be leery of what information is being presented as it may be biased.

What information is being presented? Is it consistent with other reliable information being provided on the same subject? Let's look at the example we used earlier. If you were to go to the Mayo Clinic and National Institute of Health websites to look up the herbal cold medicine, is the information being presented similar? Cross reference the information you are receiving.

You'll be using this information when evaluating the three websites I present below. The first thing you will do is look at the criteria on page one and answer the questions. Once you have filled in those questions then use your answers and your personal evolutions based on what you've read here to rate the website.

Directions

1. Please view the document (located on the previous page) then click on one of the three websites presented and evaluate them for their credibility.

2. Use the template given to rate the website you chose. Please read through the template first. The first page is the explanation or further information on how to properly analyze a website for credibility. The second page is the template you will use to evaluate the website. Rate the website on the first page of the template and answer the questions on the second.

3. On the template please specify which website you are using. Let's pretend you are writing a paper for a Nutrition Class. Click on all three links and look them over, then choose ONE to evaluate.

1. <http://dm.trysensa.com/dms2165/?gclid=CJD6gJ2N4aYCFQQFbAod1Chz0g>
2. <http://www.eatright.org/>
3. <http://www.diet.com/>