

EVALUATING WEB SITES

No person or group checks the information that is published on the Internet for accuracy or authority. **You** are responsible for evaluating the authority and accuracy of any information that you intend to use for research purposes. To do so, consider the following:

1. What are the clues to “good” information?

- **Date** — is the date the information was written and/or last updated clearly marked?
- **Author** — who is responsible for the information on the page? Does the page list professional credentials or experience which qualify that person/organization as an expert on the topic? What experience does the author have with the topic being discussed?
- **Affiliations** — is the author identified with any group or organization, which might influence his viewpoint?
- **Contact Information** — is there a way to contact the author (email, phone number, or postal address)?
- **Background** — is the information presented verifiable in outside sources?

2. Who is responsible for the information being presented?

- Is it from an individual or an organization?
- What are the goals of the author in presenting this information?
- Are the qualifications that allow the author to speak authoritatively on the topic listed?
- Are the background and expertise of the individual/organization given?
- If you have questions about any of these, email the author and ask.

3. Where is the information coming from?

- **Domain names** give basic information on where the data is originating. The domain name is the first piece of information after the http:// of an Internet address. For example, the domain name for Mt. SAC is www.mtsac.edu.
- **Extensions** are part of the domain name (such as .edu) and indicate the type of organization that is responsible for the information. Common extensions include:
 - .gov** A U.S. government web site. Governmental agencies publish most of their information online.
--Some level of editorial control over the content.
 - .edu** A college or university web site. The schools publish information, as do faculty, staff, and students.
--Limited editorial control of content.
 - .org** An organizational web site. Professional (American Medical Association) to political (NRA).
--Some editorial control of content, but must consider organizational goals.
 - .net** An Internet service company. Internet service companies allow subscribers to publish web sites.
--Only the author has editorial control of the content.
 - .com** A commercial web site. Commercial web sites deserve the most scrutiny by researchers.
--Author has editorial control, which is intended to sell you something, whether a product or opinion.

4. Did someone else consider this information to be acceptable?

- Was it reviewed or recommended in a professional journal?
- Was it linked from another site whose authority and reliability you trust?
--Most **search engines** do not screen or evaluate the sites that they index.
--**Directories** and **pathfinders** are based on the selectivity of their creators.

5. Can you write a 1-2 sentence explanation of why your Internet source is authoritative enough to include in your list of works cited?

- --Your audience will be looking at your works cited to determine how credible **you** are as an author.