



## Identifying an Authoritative Website or, how do I know if this is a “good” website?

When you are doing research on the Web, you have access to millions and millions of websites. Many of these sites are good, many of them are bad, and still others are *really* bad! To produce high-quality research papers, you must look for information on authoritative websites.

What do we mean when we tell you to use an authoritative website? An authoritative website will present reliable and trustworthy information in a clear, useful, and up-to-date fashion.

Remember, anyone can create a website. You must make sure that you choose only good websites for your research. An excellent way to ensure that you are working with an authoritative website is to evaluate what you see. You must be critical and use your own judgement.

There are many details of a website that can help you to decide whether you are looking at a “good” website. To help you to evaluate a website and to decide whether it is an authoritative source of online information, use this checklist:

### **Evaluate: Authorship**

An authoritative website will have a clearly identified author.

- Is the author of the text clearly indicated on the site?
- Is there a way to get in touch with the author?  
For example, is an e-mail address or phone number provided?
- Is there a Contact Us section?

### **Evaluate: Expertise**

An authoritative website will have a knowledgeable author.

- Are the author’s credentials indicated?
- Is the author’s background described?
- Is the author an expert in the field?
- Is the author representing a particular group or organization?

**Evaluate: Host**

An authoritative website will be hosted on a legitimate web server. Analyze the website address to see where the site is hosted.

- What organization is hosting the site?
- What is the server name? Look at the URL to determine what server hosts the site.
- What is the domain name?

**Evaluate: Currency**

An authoritative website shows signs that someone is taking care of it on a regular basis.

- Is the date that the page was created indicated?
- Is the date when the page was last updated indicated?
- If there are links to other web pages, are the links up-to-date? For example, do the links lead to live pages?
- There should not be any spelling mistakes or other errors.

**Evaluate: Purpose**

An authoritative website will have a clear reason for existing.

- Are the purpose and goals of the website clear?
- Are the purpose and goals of the authors clear?
- Is the webpage designed to get you to subscribe to a particular point of view?

**Evaluate: Content**

An authoritative website will be well written and provide in-depth on-topic analysis.

- Is the text written in "good" English (or French, or...)?
- There should not be any spelling mistakes or other errors.
- Does the site provide in-depth material?
- Is the site carefully focused on a particular topic?
- Does the webpage display a minimum of bias?
- Are there ads on the website? What is being advertised?  
The presence of ads may indicate that the site is biased.

**Evaluate: Site Design & Navigation**

An authoritative website will look good and make it easy to find information.

- Does the site have a uniform look and feel?  
The toolbars, banners, footers, colour scheme, logos, and other details should all follow a common theme or pattern.
- Is there a link back to the homepage on every page?
- Is the site easy to navigate? Is it easy to find the information you need?
- Is the site design professional?  
The site should be clean and uncluttered. There should not be too many graphics or moving images. There should not be too many colours or too many fonts.  
Ideally, there will be no ads or very few ads.

Hint: Be prepared to look at many different websites before choosing your source.

Remember: If you are unsure whether a website is authoritative, you can always show the website to your teacher or a librarian. He or she can help you determine whether the website is a good source of information for your research.