

Internet Research Tips - Finding Reliable Internet Sources By [Grace Fleming](#), About.com Guide

“The Internet is a great resource, but it is also a public forum, where anyone can make a claim or an assertion.” If you find an article that provides relevant information for your research topic, you must take care to investigate the source to make sure it is valid and reliable...

It is your responsibility as a researcher to find and use the trustworthy [sources](#). There are several ways to investigate and verify credibility of your source.

In most cases, you should stay away from Internet information that doesn't list an author. While the information you find may be true, it is more difficult to validate information if you don't know the credentials of the author. Often a web site's only author is the organization hosting the site.

If the author is named, you will want to find his/her web page to:

- Verify educational credits
- Discover if the writer is published in a scholarly journal
- Verify that the writer is employed by a research institution or university

URL

If the information is linked to an organization, try to determine the reliability of the sponsoring organization. One tip is the url ending. If the site name ends with **.edu**, it is most likely an educational institution. Even so, you should be aware of political bias.

If a site ends in **.gov**, it is most likely a reliable government web site. Government sites are usually good sources for [statistics](#) and objective reports.

Sites that end in **.org** are usually non-profit organizations. They can be very good sources OR very poor sources, so you'll have to take care to research their possible agendas or political biases, if they exist...

Online Journals and Magazines

A journal or magazine with a good reputation should contain a bibliography at the end of every article or discuss its sources clearly within the articles (like a newspaper reporter does).

Check for statistics and data within the article to back up the claims made by the author. Does the writer provide evidence to back up his statements? What kind of evidence is the writer using?

News Sources

Every television and print news source has a web site. To some extent, you can rely on the most trusted news sources, but you should not rely on them exclusively. After all, network and cable news stations are involved in entertainment. Think of them as a stepping stone to more reliable sources.

“How do you know that everything is true?”

asks [Bobby Hobgood, Ed.D.](#) from K–12 teaching and learning · the UNC School of Education in his article “Consider the Source” located at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/673>

“How does one go about verifying the accuracy of information?”

Mr. Hobgood queries before recommending the following website as a starting point for students. Check it out now:

<http://www.avon.k12.ct.us/enrichment/Enrich/quickgr4-0.htm>

The following website, from Smarthinking poses excellent questions regarding website veracity as well as many related concerns, however, it is aimed at older internet users.

http://services.smarthinking.com/static/document_library/docs/writeman/3_14.cfm

I’ve summarized their checklist of questions below:

1. Relevance: Does the website provide the information you need?
2. Author: Is the author a recognized authority on the subject? What are his/her credentials?
3. Credibility: Is contact information available for the author?
4. Audience: For whom was it written?
5. Length: Is the article very brief and/or lack links to other relevant websites?
6. Website Type Identifier: Does the website have a bias, commercial or otherwise? (Often websites ending in .com are for profit and may be trying to sell you something.)

Here is Smarthink’s list of website types:

- o .gov (government)
 - o .edu (educational)
 - o .com (commercial or personal)
 - o .net (network or portal opening; sometimes a personal website)
 - o .org (non-profit organization)
 - o .mil (military)
7. **Source Type:** “Frankly, one of the weaknesses of the Internet is that anyone at all can create and post a web page. That weakness is also one of the Internet’s greatest strengths, however. The Internet allows many people research ideas and to voice their thoughts. Therefore, when your source is a website, you must evaluate it thoroughly: Is this site an example of the Internet’s weaknesses or strengths? Ask yourself all of the questions in the checklist above and answer them honestly. The website you have found may have wonderful content, but no author; yet, if the posting organization is the “author,” and the organization itself is credible, then the site may be credible.”