Website Evaluation

Below are some standard techniques to determine whether or not a website is an appropriate source of information for college-level research. We'll start with some basic definitions.

URLs
Strings of letters and other symbols beginning with **http://** or **www** are called *URLs* or uniform resource locators. They are also called web addresses.

Top-level domain names
Are the last two or three letters in the URL of a homepage. The top-level domain name indicates the type of organization that has put up the webpage. .Edu is pretty obviously from an **edu**cational institution, and sometimes the webpages with the best information can come from .edu websites. Here are some others:

Top-Level Domain Name	Example
gov - Government agencies **org** - Organizations (nonprofit) **edu** - Educational organizations **mil** - Military **com** - Commercial businesses **net** - Network organizations **ca** - Canada	- http://www.nasa.gov - http://www.nra.org - http://www.uoregon.edu - http://www.army.mil - http://www.pepsi.com - http://www.earthlink.net - http://www.banffcentre.ca

Homepages
A homepage is the introductory web page on a website. Most of the time, a website can be considered a homepage if the URL ends with a top-level domain name.

Criteria for evaluation
Different people evaluate websites in different ways, but you can use these four general criteria to judge. You can also use these criteria to evaluate other sources of information, such as newspaper or magazine articles, or books:

- **Currency** -- When was it written? When was the page last updated?
- **Relevance** –- Is the article really saying what you think it's saying? Read it again to be sure!
- **Reliability** –- Is the content mostly opinion? Does the creator provide references or sources for data or quotations?
- **Authority** –- Who wrote the information? What are their qualifications? Who is the publisher or sponsor of the website?
- **Purpose** –- Is the information intended for children, college students, consumers, or scholars? Is the main goal of the article to entertain, persuade, inform, or sell a product?
- **Point of View** -- Does the sponsor represent a religious, political, interest, lobby, or other group? Does the author have a bias, conflict of interest, or ulterior motive?

Four Things You Can Do to Evaluate a Website

There are many things you can do to figure out whether or not a webpage is a source of quality information, but for now we'll focus on just four.

One: Find a date on it somewhere
You won't always be able to find information about how current a website is, but try. When looking for a date, be sure to look both at the top of the page and all the way down at the bottom of the page too.

Two: Truncate the URL
When you truncate a URL, you chop pieces off the end of it and hit enter in order to get to the homepage or other folders on the same website. Using this technique, you can gather clues about who put up the information and why.

For example, let's look at the following URL:
https://www.lanecc.edu/it/computerlabs

Always truncate at a slash (/). The URL above brings up a website with a list of all of the computer labs on the LCC main campus, but if I chop of the end of it to this:
https://www.lanecc.edu/it

I get the website for Information and Academic Technology at LCC. To find the homepage of the sponsoring organization, chop it down to the top-level domain name:
http://www.lanecc.edu/

This confirms that the sponsoring organization is Lane CC. We highly recommend you do this every time you are trying to figure out whether to believe a website or not.

Three: Find a link to information about who they are
You've probably seen links that offer information about the mission or background of organizations that put up websites. When you are investigating a website, be sure to look for a link that says something like "About Us," or "What we do," or "Who we are," or "Mission." Any of these will give you valuable information about the intentions of the people who put up that website. If a link like this isn't on the webpage you're looking at, then be sure to truncate the URL to get to the homepage so you can look there too.

Four: Look up the author's and the organization's names in Google
Sometimes there isn't enough information on the website itself. You might have to do a web search for more information. Go to Google, and type in the name of the author (in quotes) or the organization. See what other websites reveal. You might find the personal website of the author, or you might find out that the organization has been discredited. You never know!