

## How to Evaluate Information Sources

Evaluating websites requires that you ask yourself 6 simple questions:

### **How?**

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How did you locate the information source?:

- Take note of the path that brought you to this source. Was it a link from a trusted website? Or were you searching a library database?
- Library resources have been selected for their academic content, while web search engines produce volumes of references that must be analyzed carefully.

### **Who?**

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Who authored the source material? Are their qualifications given?:

- Find out who is responsible for providing the information you consider using.
- If a website summarizes published data, go to the original publication for confirmation.
- If no authors are given, look carefully WHERE the source material is published

### **What?**

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What type of data does the source provide?:

- Does the source discuss your topic or does it simply contain the keywords or phrases?
- Is the data reliable? Are research methods and materials provided?
- Is the data consistent with other sources?

### **Why?**

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Why was the material published?:

- Some organizations and special interest groups publish information to affect public opinion and present only selective data.
- Look for websites and print sources from trusted government agencies created to share environmental information.
- Look for articles that aim to communicate results of scientific studies:
  - Scholarly or academic articles are usually peer reviewed through an editorial board (judged by other researchers)
  - Review articles digest historical and current information to inform researchers
  - Communications are short articles for passing on ideas or results quickly
  - Proceedings from conferences describe potential breakthroughs. These are not peer-reviewed, however, and are not good sources for your assignments. Information in a published article by the author(s) is more reliable.

## **When?**

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When was the material published? Is it current?

- Web pages should give a date for the publication or latest update. If no date is shown or it seems out of date, question whether you should find something more reliable.

## **Where?**

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Where is the source data published?

- For an Internet source, check the web address.
  - Addresses ending or containing the following letters inspire more confidence:
    - .edu (education)
    - .gov (American government)
    - .gc (Canadian government)
  - Addresses ending or containing .org (organization) can also be useful
  - Country of origin may also be identified (.ca, .fr, etc.)
- Take note of the publishers of journals and magazines. Are they respected organizations such as the American Chemical Society or the Royal Society of Chemistry?
- Some academic journals are more relevant than others, depending on the subject matter.