

The C.A.R.S. Checklist for Evaluating Internet Sources



You should evaluate every web site you use for research or for personal information. The CARS checklist for evaluating internet sources is listed below. Ask yourself the following questions about each site and try to use only those that have the best evidence of credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support.

For more detailed information on using the CARS checklist, see:
<http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>

Credibility	Goal: A source that is created by a person or organization who knows the subject and who cares about its quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a publishing or sponsoring organization? Is the organization an authority on the subject?• Is the author listed? Is the author an authority on the subject? How do you know?• Are there spelling errors, grammar errors, dead links, or other problems that indicate a lack of quality control?	
Accuracy	Goal: A source with information that is current, complete, and correct
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the information on the site agree with other sources?• Does the site contradict itself?• What is the date of publication or copyright?• How recently has the site been updated?	
Reasonableness	Goal: A source that is truthful and unbiased
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the author, host, publisher, or sponsor have a bias?• What is the motivation or purpose for creating the site? (To sell a product? To advance a viewpoint or belief? To educate?)	
Support	Goal: A source with verifiable sources of information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the sources listed? Can they be checked?• Is there a way to contact the author or organization?	

Where should you look to find this information?

Ideally, information such as the author, host organization, and publication date will be easily located at either the top or bottom of the page. However, you may need to dig deeper:

- You can find out about the host organization by looking at the URL, especially the domain name (i.e., cnn.com, harvard.edu, cdc.gov). There are no universal rules for which domains are good or bad, but the domain name can help you identify the host organization.
- The information you need might even be on a different page. Try clicking on "About..." or "Contact Us" to find more information. You can also just enter the domain name without anything past the first slash (i.e., shorten "www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm" to "www.virtualsalt.com") and see what information you find.

Tip: Save some work by creating your bibliographic citation while you evaluate. Many of the elements you need to cite a web page in MLA Style (author, publisher, date, etc.) are the same ones you need to evaluate its quality. If more than a few of these are missing, the site is probably not a good one!

Adapted with permission from: Harris, Robert. "Evaluating Internet Research Sources." <http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>