How to identify reliable Internet sources

1. Authority -
   • Is there an author?
     • Are the author’s qualifications for writing on the topic clearly stated?
     • What is author’s reputation
     • What is the author’s educational background
     • What organization does the author represent, if any?
   • Is the Web site signed?
   • Is it clear who is responsible for the content?
   • Is there a copyright holder?
   • Are sources (references) of information provided?
   • Is there contact information or a means to verify the legitimacy of a person or organization?
     • What are their credentials?
     • Is there an address, phone number, URL domain, email address of author

   The domain can determine several key pieces of information. The common URL domains are defined as follows:

   .gov indicates Web pages sponsored or written by U.S. government agencies

   .org advocacy or noncommercial organization, including nonprofit groups

   .com the ubiquitous URL that identifies commercial or marketing sites; generally for profit Web sites

   .edu Web pages sponsored by an educational institution

   .net Internet networks

   .int international organizations sites

   .ca, .jp, .uk, etc. represent country domains

2. Purpose - The reliability of the information can be affected by the motivation of the Web site sponsors.
   • What is the purpose and goal of the Web site?
   • Who benefits?
   • Why was the Web site created?
   • Who is sponsoring the page

3. Accuracy
   • Does the information seem accurate from what you may already know?
• Are there errors in spelling or typos, formatting or linking problems?
• Is the information documented and edited? Is there a bibliography?
• Do the sources seem scholarly, or even reasonable?
• Are sources for any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified?
• Is it clear who has the responsibility for the accuracy of the content of the material?

4. Objectivity - Is the information presented without bias? Or are there subjective statements or opinions?
• Consider carefully the choice of words. Are they employed to inform or are they trying to sell, manipulate, or persuade you?
• Are there logical errors or conspicuously missing facts or issues?
• If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly differentiated from informational material?
• Are there games, contests, giveaways, or celebrity endorsements?
• Is the information provided as a public service?
• What is the purpose of the page – to explain, persuade, inform?
• Does the site have a particular political perspective?
• Does the site have a cultural or religious viewpoint?
• Does the person or company sponsoring this site have a vested interest in the information provided?
• Is this site trying to sell something?

5. Currency - Every credible Web site should include the date it was created and when it was last revised. Then the data should be examined to determine if it is up-to-date.
• Do the links work?
• Is there contact information for individuals who are responsible for the content of the Web site?
• Can you even determine if someone is maintaining the site?
• Is it clear when the data of any graphs/charts were gathered?
• Does the date of this webpage matter for your research?
  • Are you doing historical research
  • Does your topic demand most up to date information

6. Coverage -
• Is there a description detailing the coverage and scope?
• Is there a print equivalent for comparison?
• Is there an indication the content is complete? Or, are there signs that the Web site is still under construction?
• Is the same level of detail applied evenly throughout the site? The same depth of coverage?
• Can you recognize any obvious omissions?
• How in depth is the information/material
• If the material is from a work which is out of copyright, have efforts been made to update the material to make it more current?
7. Audience - Who is the intended audience?

**Internet Content: reliability and authority rules of thumb**

Refereed/Peer reviewed journal articles
   Peer reviewed or refereed journals are considered most authoritative and reliable because other expert scholars have reviewed the writing and information.

Periodical indexes and reference books
   Well researched, written by subject experts, reviewed by editors for accuracy.

Electronic Library Reference Files and Tools
   Look for front-end descriptions to determine what content you

Government site sponsored by government agencies and registered under .gov domain.
   Government or public agencies sites serve as an ideal channel for public service information dissemination.

Educational Institution Sources with .edu extensions
   Schools, colleges and universities that provide and update verifications and contact information.
   While a school Website may be part of the school's educational mission, the Website is also a marketing tool to attract students and teachers

Commercial Web sites (.com) where author and/or contact information, currency, and accuracy can be verified. Company Web sites if services are provided or product information is available. Site will be maintained and regularly updated.
   Think "commerce," "business" or "marketing" – 30% of sites on the Net are trying to SELL something! Proceed with caution.

News Web sites registered under .com or .net domains
   Are articles authored? Copyright holder provided? Legitimacy: Is there a print version? Can the enterprise be contacted at an address or phone number?
   Professional journalists best perform news reporting. Beware of sites where no sources are credited.

Nonprofit organization sites (usually include the .org domain) when contact and update information is provided.
   Many organizations have an agenda to raise funds or solicit support both financially and philosophically. Beware of .org sites that cannot provide proof of legitimacy.

Personal Web pages (usually with .com or .net extensions)
   Sites created by individuals should be judged for their objectivity or bias. Sites where author, currency and contact information are not available must be considered questionable.