HOW TO FIND RELIABLE DIGITAL SOURCES

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In a world where so much information is available to us at any given minute, how do we begin to sort which information is reliable and useful to shape our opinions on? Use the tips below to identify reliable online sources.

WHERE TO START?

Search Engines: such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo. A search engine uses an algorithm, or formula, to find keywords and sort information by relevance and accuracy. However, some website publishers will manipulate the information on their website to appear higher in a search so being at the top doesn't always mean it's the best source.

Wikipedia: Wikipedia is a collaborative encyclopedia— in other words, people from around the world are always adding or deleting information. There is no realistic way to know if the editors of the content are truly experts. Therefore, Wikipedia could be a place to start for general information about a subject, but you should seek further proof before trusting what you read there.

WHEN TO CLICK, & WHEN TO SCROLL BY?

Titles: The first thing you'll see in online search results will probably be the titles of the articles. Titles may seem straightforward, but there are some things to be aware of.

Sensationalism is the practice of presenting information in an exaggerated, dramatic, or provocative way to attract attention or stir emotions, often at the expense of accuracy, balance, or context.

Example: Shocking New Report Reveals Secrets They Don't Want You to Know—Your Community's Future Is at Risk!

Clickbait refers to sensationalized ads designed to grab attention with catchy or unbelievable headlines. Many websites use clickbait to drive traffic and increase "clicks" so they can sell more advertisements on their website.

Example: You Won't Believe What This Small Town Did to Solve Their Biggest Problem!

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Source: It's best to use trusted sources like major news organizations (like the BBC or NPR) or academic institutions. Some pieces run by news organizations, like opinion pieces or reviews, may be subjective (based on personal opinions and feelings). See below for the types of domain extensions and who uses them.

Social media refers to any digital platform where users create and share content with others. We can learn skills from each other on social media, like learning how to change a tire, but they come from the creator's perspective which may not be research based.

Common Platforms:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- X (formerly Twitter)
- TikTok

Domain Extension	Source	Who can create?
.gov	Governmental	Government
.edu	Educational	Educational Institutions
.com	Commercial	Anyone
.org or .net	Check the site sponsor	Anyone

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ONCE YOU'RE THERE?

Author: The author needs to have expertise to make impartial claims about the topics they cover so they don't favor one viewpoint over others.

Timeliness: Information and news can move quickly, be sure to check the publication date of the site so you know you are looking at recent articles and publications.

Audience: Some organizations have very specific audiences. Sometimes the intended audience may affect the information's slant or reliability.

SOURCES

Stephenson, Laura. (2010). *Becoming an Informed Citizen*. University of Kentucky Extension Publications FCS6-216. https://publications.ca.uky.edu/fcs6-216

Purdue Online Writing Lab. (2024). *Evaluating Digital Sources*. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/evaluating_sources_of_information/evaluating_digital_sources.html

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INFORMATION RELIABILITY CHECKLIST

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It can be difficult to determine what information out there is actually true. Some sources share misinformation, which is incorrect or misleading. Other sources sometimes spread false information in order to influence public opinion, which is called disinformation.

Use this checklist when determining the reliability of a source:

Consider the credibility of the source	Yes	No
1. Is the publishing organization known for accuracy and reliability?		
2. Is the author clearly identified and does the author have relevant expertise or credentials?		
3. Are facts, statements, and claims supported by evidence?		
4. Has the source been updated as new information becomes available?		
5. Has the source been reviewed or verified for accuracy by experts or been through a peer-review process?		
Consider the motive of the article		
1. What objective does the source want to achieve?		
2. Does the article show bias or sensationalism to persuade the reader?		

Did you find that your source was reliable? If not, continue looking until you find an article that meets all of the criteria in the checklist. We are our best citizens when we keep ourselves informed by reliable resources.

SOURCES

Stephenson, Laura. (2010). *Becoming an Informed Citizen*. University of Kentucky Extension Publications FCS6-216. https://publications.ca.uky.edu/fcs6-216

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