

A Student Guide to . . . WEBSITE CREDIBILITY



Determining the credibility of websites can be a difficult challenge. There are no hard-fast rules to follow. Although few if any websites are absolutely credible and free of bias, numerous clues can be found to help determine a degree of credibility.

*Clues that indicate a **high likelihood** of credibility include . . .*

- ~ websites that are .gov
- ~ websites that are .edu

Examples of highly credible websites:

- www.noaa.gov
- www.epa.gov
- www.mcde2.missouri.edu

*Clues that are a **good indication** of credibility include . . .*

- ~ websites with an 'about us' or 'about this site' tab that leads to searchable experts or organizations who created the website
- ~ websites that are updated frequently - look for date of 'last update'
- ~ those that are peer reviewed - look for 'reviewed by'

*Clues that indicate **varying degrees** of credibility . . .*

- ~ websites that are .com
- ~ websites that are .org
- ~ websites that are .net

Many .com, .org, and .net websites are credible, but these designations are not necessarily indicators of consistent credibility and lack of bias.

*Clues that indicate a **lower degree** of website credibility . . . **the red flags!***

- ~ no 'about us' or 'about this site' tab, or an 'about us' tab that is a dead link
- ~ mystery 'experts' not found or identified elsewhere *or* only found at other questionable websites
- ~ organization is fictitious, misleading, or not found elsewhere
- ~ high number of dead links *or* all links go to same website
- ~ product advertisements disguised as news

Examples of low credibility websites:

- www.expertmedjournal.com/#
- www.usmedicaljournal.com
- www.channel6reports.com/health/
- www.newyorkchronicle.org/

Keep in mind:

- * Credibility depends upon the information being searched - information *about* an organization or individual may be quite credible at their website, yet there may be a degree of bias.
- * Be wary of websites that speak in absolutes . . . 'the best', 'the worst', 'the only', 'everything you need to know about . . .'
- * A website's credibility is enhanced if multiple sources are in agreement.
- * There are degrees of credibility - credibility is more than a yes/no designation.
- * Although misspelled words are not necessarily an indication of limited credibility, their presence should raise concerns.
- * Professional appearance is *not* an indication of credibility!
- * **Utilize numerous indicators (as described above) before determining an overall credibility of a website.**

Use common sense when evaluating the credibility of websites - it is easy to be fooled!