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8 Ways to Determine Website Reliability

Beware of Bias, Look for Expertise

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Updated June 12, 2019

For every reputable website, there are dozens chock full of information that's inaccurate, unreliable or just plain nutty. For the unwary, inexperienced journalist or researcher, such sites can present a minefield of possible problems. With that in mind, here are eight ways to tell if a website is reliable.

1. Look for Sites from Established Institutions

The internet is full of websites that were started five minutes ago. What you want are sites associated with trusted institutions that have been around for awhile and have a proven track record of reliability and integrity.

Such sites may include those run by government agencies, non-profit organizations, foundations, or colleges and universities.

2. Look for Sites with Expertise

You wouldn't go to an auto mechanic if you broke your leg, and you wouldn't go to the hospital to have your car repaired. I'm making an obvious point: Look for websites that specialize in the kind of information you're seeking. So if you're writing a story on a flu outbreak, check out medical websites, such as the Centers for Disease Control, and so on.

3. Steer Clear of Commercial Sites

Sites run by companies and business — their websites usually end in .com — are more often than not trying to sell you something. And if they're trying to sell you something, chances are whatever information they're presenting will be tilted in favor of their product. That's not to say corporate sites should be excluded entirely. But be wary.

4. Beware of Bias

[Reporters](#) write a lot about politics, and there are plenty of political websites out there. But many of them are run by groups that have a bias in favor of one political party or philosophy. A conservative website isn't likely to report objectively on a liberal politician, and vice versa. Steer clear of sites with a political ax to grind and instead look for ones that are non-partisan.

5. Check the Date

As a reporter you need the most up-to-date information available, so if a website seems old, it's probably best to steer clear. One way to check — look for a "last updated" date on the page or site.

6. Consider the Site's Look

If a site looks poorly designed and amateurish, chances are it was created by amateurs. Steer clear. But be careful — just because a website is professionally designed doesn't mean it's reliable.

7. Avoid Anonymous Authors

Articles or studies whose authors are named are often — though not always — more reliable than works produced [anonymously](#). It makes sense: If someone is willing to put their name on something they've written, chances are they stand by the information it contains. And if you have the name of the author, you can always Google them to check their credentials.

8. Check the Links

Reputable websites often link to each other. You can find out which other websites link to the site you're researching by conducting a link-specific Google search. Enter the following text into the Google search field, replacing "[WEBSITE]" with the domain of the site you're researching:

link:http://www.[WEBSITE].com

The search results will show you which websites link to the one you're researching. If lots of sites are linking to your site, and those sites seem reputable, then that's a good sign.