Vetting Online Sources:

How Do You Know Your Information is Fact and Not Fiction?

Part 1 - the 5Ws

The old formula used by police, journalists, and researchers – Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How – can be applied for internet searches to help identify credible online sources.

Ask yourself:

WHO is the source of the information?

- Has someone taken responsibility for the content of this website?
- Is information about the author or organization clearly stated?
- Are there any links to in-depth information about the author or organization?
- Can you contact the company or author through a real world postal address or phone number?
- Can you confirm that the company or author is a credible authoritative source of information?
- Can you verify the authority of any of the site's content that is attributed to other sources?
- Is the information biased in any way?
- Does the site rely on loaded language or broad unsubstantiated statements?

WHaT are you getting?

- Is emotion used as a means of persuasion?
- Does the site offer more than one viewpoint?
- Are there links to other or alternative viewpoints?
- Does the site's information seem thorough and well organized?
- Does the site clearly state the topics it intends to address?
- Does it follow through on the information it has promised?
- Does the information seem complete and consistent?
- Is the information well written and easy to understand?
- Does the site offer a list of further in-depth resources or links to such resources?
- What is the copyright status of material found on the site?

WHEN was the site created?

- Is it important that the information you're looking for be absolutely current?
- Is a reference date provided to show when the material was put online or when it was last updated?
- Do the links work?

WHERE are you?

The type of organization behind a website can give some clues to its credibility.

.gov In the U.S., .gov applies to federal departments. In Canada, provincial governments use .gov followed by a provincial or territorial abbreviation and .ca.

.gc The federal government in Canada uses .gc in its domain name and in the domain names of many of its departments, such as Industry Canada and Canadian Heritage. However, some government websites, such as the Canadian Human Rights Commission (www.chrc-ccdp.ca), opt for just .ca.

.ca The Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) is the non-profit corporation responsible for overseeing and keeping a registry of the ".ca" Internet country code domain for Canada. Schools, educational organizations, libraries, museums, and some government departments may be registered under a 2-digit country-of-origin code, such as .ca, .uk or .au. However, it's important to remember that any Canadian organization can obtain a .ca domain.

.edu The U.S. originally created .edu to indicate American colleges and universities offering 4-year degree programs. Most Canadian universities tend to use .ca.

.org   .com   .net

Back in the early days of the Web, *.org* indicated a wide assortment of groups, including non-profit organizations; *.com* indicated commercial organizations; and *.net* was intended for organizations directly involved in Internet operations, such as Internet service providers.

Now, anyone can apply for and use these letters in their domain names. For example, the YWCA website in Oakville ends with .com, in Vancouver, it ends with .org; and in Montreal it ends with .ca.

- Apply the *Five Ws* of cyberspace to the websites you visit.
- Double-check your facts and sources – and then check them some more!
- Use Meta-Web information searches to assess the credibility of websites. This can be done by entering the author's name into a search engine to conduct a quick background check. Or you can find which sites link to a specific site by going to a search engine and entering a "link:" command in the "Search" box, followed by the page's URL.

WHY are you here?

Before you saddle up and ride out into cyberspace, it's a good idea to stop and consider whether or not the Internet is even the best place to go. Ask yourself:

- Can I get the information faster offline?
- Does the online material I'm finding suit my needs?

HOW can you tell what's what?

- When in doubt, doubt. Scepticism should be the rule of thumb on the Internet.

Applying your Knowledge:

Check out the following website and determine if it is a good source of information:

http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/

Using the 5Ws, evaluate this source. Explain if it is a reliable source or not and why.

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Part 2 - Tips and Tricks for Better Searches

1. Use quotes to search for an exact phrase
This one's a well-known, simple trick: searching a phrase in quotes will yield only pages with the same words in the same order as what's in the quotes. It's one of the most vital search tips, especially useful if you're trying to find results containing a specific a phrase.
2. Use an asterisk within quotes to specify unknown or variable words
Here's a lesser known trick: searching a phrase in quotes with an asterisk replacing a word will search all variations of that phrase. It's helpful if you're trying to determine a song from its lyrics, but you couldn't make out the entire phrase (e.g. "imagine all the * living for today"), or if you're trying to find all forms of an expression (e.g. "* is thicker than water").
3. Use the minus sign to eliminate results containing certain words
You'll want to eliminate results with certain words if you're trying to search for a term that's generating a lot of results that aren't of interest to you. Figure out what terms you're not interested in (e.g. jaguar -car) and re-run the search.
4. Search websites for keywords
Think of the "site:" function as a Google search that searches only a particular website. If you want to see every time TIME.com mentioned Google, use the search "Google site:TIME.com".
5. Search news archives going back to the mid-1880s
Google News has an option to search over 100 years' worth of archived news from newspapers around the world.
6. Compare foods using "vs"

Can't decide between a burger or pizza for dinner? Type in "rice vs. quinoa," for example, and you'll receive side-by-side comparisons of the nutritional facts.

7. Use a colon to search specific sites

There may be an instance where you need to Google search for articles or content on a certain website. The syntax is very simple and we'll show you below.

- Sidney Crosby site:nhl.com

This will search for all content about famous hockey player Sidney Crosby, but only on [NHL.com](). All other search results will be removed. If you need to find specific content on a particular site, this is the shortcut you can use.

8. Using two letter codes to find sources from a particular country.

Using "country codes", searches are limited to a particular country. "site:KP"

Country Codes are found here: https://goes.gsfc.nasa.gov/text/web_country_codes.html

example for North Korea - site:KP Missile launches

To make the search limited to academic sources, type - site:ac.kp Missile launches

Find sources for your project:

Source #1 - URL _____

Using 5Ws, explain why this is a good source.

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Information collected:

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Source #2 - URL _____

Using 5Ws, explain why this is a good source.

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Information collected:

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Source #3 - URL _____

Using 5Ws, explain why this is a good source.

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Information collected:

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