Welcome to the Mundt Library at Dakota State University. We are here to help you with all of your information needs whether it be research for a class or personal interest in a topic. If you have any questions, feel free to ask a librarian.

In this video you will learn about evaluating websites found using internet search engines. The learning objectives addressed include: the ability to note why websites need to be evaluated differently from other sources, discovery of tools that can be used in evaluating websites, and learning how domains provide clues as to the quality of websites.

Did you know that the internet is now on computers? And did you also know that there is a lot of stuff on the internet? These questions are pretty obvious, but not as obvious is the quality of that stuff on the internet. It turns out that a major positive aspect of the internet is also its biggest downfall for someone searching for information.

Anyone can put something on the internet. Scientists, gamers, racists, professors, your uncle Harry, depressed teenagers, government offices, gardeners, soldiers, secret agents, grade-schoolers, artists, liberals, conservatives, Nazis, groupies, secretaries, politicians, hackers, rock collectors, hate groups, love groups, librarians, psychologists, sports fans, doctors, musicians, rich, poor, poets, senators, aids, Goths, jock, nerds, divas, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, freaks, geeks, construction workers, mothers, fathers, directors, newscasters... the list continues. Each of these individuals has the same rights and abilities to post content online. Unlike in the case of books or periodicals, their work goes through no editorial process. No one checks to make sure the information is true, so it is up to you as a researcher to critically look at each site and determine its value.

As addressed in a prior video, evaluation is a critical component of conducting research and choosing sources. When evaluating a website, you should use the same evaluation criteria as used for any other source. They include: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage.

**Authority**

Due to the fact that anyone can create and maintain a website, extra consideration must be given to the evaluation criteria of Authority. There are ways to find out about the author and or publisher of a website. Many web pages have an About Us link that will provide you with background information. If the content creator is a part of a larger organization, you should check up on that organization. There are also websites that allow you to find out who has registered a specific URL. Some of these include WHOIS Search available at [www.networksolutions.com/whois/index.jsp](http://www.networksolutions.com/whois/index.jsp) and InterNIC available at [www.internic.net/whois.html](http://www.internic.net/whois.html).

Another thing to consider then evaluating a website is the links connecting to and from the page. The creator of a website will often include links that they find useful and that support their views. So if all f
the links on a page lead you to material on Holocaust Denial, you could infer that the webpage creator also holds that the Holocaust did not occur. It is also important to know who is linking to a page. Often when a page has quality information, it will be referenced by other sites. This is the same theory as when you cite sources for a research paper. The better the source, the more times it will be cited. You can determine who is linking to a site by using the format link:URL from Google.

**Domains**

Another characteristic to consider when evaluating a website is the domain. Common domains include: .gov, .edu, .com, .org, and .net. Some domains that you may not be familiar with are .biz for business sites, .aero for aviation related sites, .coop for cooperative sites, and .info for informative sites. The domain will tell you what type of institution is associated with a webpage. This will help you in determining the authority and objectivity of a site.

The domain .gov is dedicated to sites created by governmental offices. Things you should consider when evaluating .gov sites include: these sites should be free of bias and opinion; the U.S. government is the biggest producer of information in the United States; government reports often contain statistics and raw data; different government agencies have their own websites for example: the Department of the Interior, Department of Transportation, and Legislative Branch; state, county, and city governments also host websites; and personal webpages of senators, representatives, and other government officials also have a .gov domain. This is an open area for them to promote individual agendas. Political bias may be found on these pages. In summary, websites with a .gov domain should provide you with reliable information.

The domain .com is dedicated for sites created by commercial companies. Things you should consider when evaluating .co sites include: a company trying to sell a product will not share negative aspects of its merchandise and news websites such as CNN, The New York Times, and FoxNews also have .com domains. In summary, websites with a .com domain should be treated with caution to ensure the accuracy of the information.

The domain .edu is dedicated for sites created by educational institutions. Things you should consider when evaluating .edu sites include: educational institutions such as colleges and universities will sometimes conduct research projects and then offer those reports online; the personal websites of faculty, staff, and students also have a .edu domain, these pages are not checked for accuracy or bias; the domain .edu is applied to research universities down to elementary schools, information created by fifth graders may be accurate, but it is not appropriate for college papers. In summary, websites with a .edu domain may have high quality information, but they should be checked for audience and content.

The domain .org is dedicated to sites created by nonprofit organizations. Things you should consider when evaluating a .org site include the following: organizations often promote a specific side of an issue, for example the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and Greenpeace; many well known organizations also have .org domains for example: the Nobel Prize, Mayo Clinic, and public libraries. In summary, websites with a .org domain may have quality information as long as any bias is taken into account.
Practice

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia has led to extensive debate and controversy. It has devoted followers who claim it is compiling knowledge and bringing it to the masses. It also has staunch detractors who claim it is corrupting the idea of truth. But as is often the case, neither side is completely right. There are both positives and negatives to Wikipedia.

Your professor may have told you to steer clear of Wikipedia. She is not trying to make your life difficult. There are important reasons to be wary of the information on Wikipedia. Anyone can add, edit, or delete items. This means you do not know their credentials or what right they have to make edits on this page. Inaccuracies may be corrected on a page, but you may access that page while it is incorrect. This means that you can never be sure if the information is accurate. Any information you find must be double checked. Also much of the information on Wikipedia is basic facts. To write a quality research paper, you need more than facts. You need analysis, critique, and research data.

There are also ways that Wikipedia could be an asset when you are conducting research. If you are given a topic that you are completely unfamiliar with, Wikipedia could give you a short background and some key issues related to the topic. The bibliographies found on Wikipedia entries could also provide you with other sources to consult on your topic. There may be books or periodical articles that contain information you need. And remember, the importance of evaluation criteria differs depending on your information need. You could be having a discussion with friends about your favorite TV shows and have an argument develop as to when “Muppet Babies” was on the air. Wikipedia tells you the series ran from 1984-1990 on CBS with reruns shown until 1992.

The internet is a wide open place to find information on almost any topic. It feels like a natural place to conduct research; however, with power comes responsibility. Before you use any website for a paper or any other information need, you must evaluate, evaluate, evaluate. If you have any questions about evaluating a source, feel free to ask a librarian. They will be able to help you with the criteria.

Within this video, you learned about why websites need to be evaluated differently from print sources. Various criteria were looked at including: who is responsible for a site, who links to a site, and what the domain can tell you about a site.

Answers to Quiz Questions
- Would you use the site tree octopus for your biology paper? Yes or No.
  http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus
  - No. Your teacher may give you a strange look if you tell him about the fictional tree octopus.
• Would you use the site Endangered for your biology paper? Yes or No. 
http://www.fws.gov/endangered/
  o Yes. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would have reliable information as they are the government agency responsible for U.S. involvement with endangered species.

• Would you use the site Polar Bear for your biology paper? Yes or No. 
  o No. This site is hosted by a group opposed to the “liberal bias in many news outlets” quote from CSNNews website. This shows its own bias. The site is also a news site, it would be better for you to use a biology focused site for your paper.

• Would you use the site Wild Ones for you biology paper? Yes or No. 
http://www.thewildones.org/animal.html
  o No. While there is reliable information on this site, it is meant for a younger audience.