

know how to spot the difference, to become a careful consumer of online information.

How do I confirm the reliability of information on a web page?

Determining the reliability of web pages, like determining the credibility of any published information, involves gathering information about the document, the author, the publisher, and carefully analyzing the data before reaching a conclusion. For criteria and a step-by-step tool for critical analysis of web page information, see the IMSA [Evaluation Wizard](#) .

What should I look for?



The IMSA Evaluation Wizard provides many questions to guide your analysis. In general you will want to check for information on the author, the publisher, and alternative opinions. It is important to know who's information you are using and why they believe as they do. Will you use the country western singer's web page on cancer or the one by the American Cancer Society? Why?

Triangulation of data is most important.

Always have at least three reliable sources that *agree* on an important point. If you use three different sources to write a report about our solar system, and they all give a different distance between the earth and the sun (some estimating, some rounding, etc.), then which figure will you use on the exam next week?

Finally, double-check language. If you don't recognize a word or a web page is using unfamiliar technical terminology, look it up in an online dictionary and/or encyclopedia. Make sure the author isn't fabricating myths. Many a professional technical page has turned out to be nothing more than an elaborate hoax. Anyone remember the scientists who proved they cloned a human baby? New versions of reference books published in print for sale will not be available online. Companies will try to earn money by

selling hard copy books first. Look for back issue books or newspapers and white papers if the topic is current.

Where should I look?



The invisible web is a haven for all those treasured "traditional" resources you remember from the brick and mortar library. These independent databases usually have their own internal search mechanism for retrieving documents they maintain. Check out online libraries, professional associations, biographies, bibliographies, encyclopedias and the like online. Look for publications by the author or organization in traditional formats, such as magazines and journals. Checking online newspapers can substantiate even fresh data. Be careful not to pick papers that are run by the same companies, because these share news services and thus the same stories. When possible go for the global perspective; check papers from different countries, even continents. Most have English translated options.

Back on the World Wide Web, now that search engines are beginning to index PDF files, more white papers and business documents are being made available online. Look for comparable scientific reports to corroborate research findings. Check official data tables against reports that claim the census numbers as # and the CDC says "". Don't just take their word for it; be skeptical. But don't chuck the whole thing as worthless; there is a great deal of valuable information just waiting for you to drop by.

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End of Micromodule - traditional.

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