Website Evaluation Criteria

A crucial step in conducting research is evaluating sources to determine reliability and relevancy. Unlike books and journal articles, websites may not have gone through any editing or fact-checking process. Remember, anyone can publish a webpage on any topic. It is up to you to be sure it is a reliable source.

Authority
- Is the author’s name available? Is there contact information available?
- What are the author’s training, education, and experience in the field?
- Is there an “About Us” link?
- Was the site authored by a professional organization?
- Does the site have an institutional affiliation like a university or a hospital. i.e. Johns Hopkins?

Reliability
- Is the information correct, as far as you can tell? Look at several information sources to compare.
- Does the author cite his or her sources? Does the website have a complete bibliography?
- Does the website appear to be edited? Do you see poor grammar or misspelled words?
- What is the origin of the webpage? The domain name, or last part of the web address can give you clues to the website’s origin. The most common domain names are:
  - .edu – an educational institution
  - .gov – a government agency
  - .com – a commercial website
  - .org – a not-for-profit organization
- Generally, .edu and .gov sites are considered credible sources of information. Sometimes websites from countries outside of the U.S. will end in their country code i.e. United Kingdom .uk

Objectivity
- Does there appear to be bias on the part of the writer? Is the information objective, or does it appeal to emotions or preconceptions?
- Is the information presented as fact, which can be checked, or as the opinion of the writer?

Currency
- When was the information written and published? If it is not dated, you should be cautious of the information source. On web pages, the date of publication and/or last updated date are usually found at the bottom of the page.
- Is your topic one which is changing quickly, such as medical research or technology, or one which is fairly stable and requires more background information (such as history or literature)?