



Finding Trustworthy Internet Sources

The internet is a place where you can find just about all the information in the world in a couple of seconds. The advantage of this is that good information for your research papers is just mouse-clicks away. The disadvantage is that bad information is just as close.

No substitution for traditional research

- ✍ The first thing you should know is that internet sources are no substitution for both reading and quoting good books.
- ✍ The same applies to good magazines and scholarly journals. Don't fail to use these sources in your research process.
- ✍ Internet sources should *enhance*, not *replace*, traditional research methods.

Trustworthy domains: .edu, .gov, etc.

- ✍ The extension of the website can be very useful towards finding trustworthy sources. By 'extension' I mean the *.com* in the address *www.thisisawebsite.com*.
- ✍ *.gov* sites belong to the government. Sites such as these are considered accurate and trustworthy sources.
- ✍ Sites with the *.edu* extension belong to a university. They have that university's seal of approval on them because of the *.edu* extension; it is safe to say that such sites generally carry the authority of that university. Few internet sources could be more trustworthy than these!
- ✍ The *.org* domain is for organizations. Sites with *.org* domains are often more trustworthy than *.com* sites, though the level of trustworthiness varies from organization to organization; and an organization's relevance to your project will also vary.
 - ✍ A charitable organization that works in the Sudan may be a good source for research on humanitarian crises of our day and age; an organization that exists specifically to collect statistics on American religion (www.barna.org) would typically be a trustworthy source when all you need to do is quote such data. On the other hand, www.moveon.org and www.gop.org are both biased sites where political data are concerned.
 - ✍ Distinguish between *.org* sites that provide accurate information for your project and ones that don't.
- ✍ The *.com* extension stands for "commercial." The *.com* extension is a catch-all category that includes all sorts of things.
 - ✍ Don't use just any *.com* for your research paper. Some *.com*'s are run by very respectable, intelligent people. Others are pure frivolity or pure lies.
 - ✍ Like *.org* sites, *.com* sites vary both in accuracy and relevance.
 - ✍ Websites with the *.com* extension are like most internet sources: researchers need to evaluate each website to determine if it is trustworthy and appropriate to their research projects.

Scholarly databases

- ✍ Dallas Baptist University makes an invaluable wealth of knowledge accessible to its students through its library (www.dbu.edu/library).
- ✍ A scholarly journal contains scholarly information in a given field of study, intended for professionals and students.
- ✍ The collection of databases containing information from articles in scholarly journals is probably the single best online resource for research papers.

- ✍ For example . . .
 - ✍ Ebsco's Academic Search Premier search and InfoTrac's Expanded Academic ASAP search are very useful for all sorts of research projects.
 - ✍ Archives of the *Dallas Morning News* are available through DBU's database subscriptions.
 - ✍ Gale's Literary Index will help you with the research papers for your English class.
 - ✍ Ebsco's Religion and Philosophy collection will help you in your religion classes.
- ✍ These are only a handful of examples. Writing a major research paper without the aid of scholarly journals from the online databases made available . . . would be, to say the least, a very bad idea. If you're on campus, click here to go straight to the list of databases.

The Wikipedia phenomenon

- ✍ Wikipedia is such an important internet phenomenon that an analysis of trustworthy internet sources simply has to deal with it. Wikipedia of www.wikipedia.com is an online, free, user-written encyclopedia.
- ✍ It has a wealth of information because everyone can contribute to its articles. New articles appear daily, and old articles are constantly growing and being revised.
- ✍ A wealth of information does not mean that Wikipedia's information is trustworthy. Anyone could have written the section of that article you want to quote.
- ✍ There is a right way and a wrong way to use Wikipedia in your research process. It can be a useful source in the early stages of your research; if you don't know a thing about something you're writing about, sometimes it can help to see if Wikipedia has an article about that topic.
- ✍ If it does, you can use that article to familiarize yourself with the issue. That way you'll have a clue what you're talking about. Some of the *details* in the Wikipedia article might have been incorrect, but the odds are in your favor that that article as a whole was not too bad; you just have to let your knowledge of the topic be corrected by later research through more trustworthy sources. This sort of thing is the *right* way to use Wikipedia.
- ✍ There is a *wrong* way to use Wikipedia. That is to *fully trust what it says to be correct*. Don't quote Wikipedia articles in your research papers!

It's all about the source

- ✍ There are few rules that cover all categories with no exceptions. The bottom line of all this is that it's all about the source. Learn how to use trustworthy sources and not use untrustworthy sources.
- ✍ Learn how to use the source for what it is.
- ✍ Both of these strategies presuppose that we are already learning to find out what a site is in the first place. We need to be in the process of continually learning how to do this.

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