

How to conduct reliable internet research

1. Look for Sites from Established Institutions

The web is full of websites that were started five minutes ago. What you want are sites associated with trusted institutions that have been around for a while and have a proven track record of reliability and integrity.

2. Look for Sites with Expertise

You wouldn't go to an auto mechanic if you broke your leg, and you wouldn't go to the hospital to have your car repaired. I'm making an obvious point: Look for websites that specialize in the kind of information you're seeking. So if you're writing a story on STIs, check out medical websites, and so on.

3. Don't ignore the suffix on the domain name (the three-letter part that comes after the ".")

The suffix is usually (but not always) descriptive of what type of entity hosts the website. Keep in mind that it is possible for sites to obtain suffixes that are misleading. Here are some examples:

- ,, .edu = educational
- ,, .com = commercial
- ,, .mil = military
- ,, .gov = government
- ,, .org = nonprofit

4. Steer Clear of Commercial Sites

Sites run by companies and business - their websites usually end in .com - are more often than not trying to sell you something. And if they're trying to sell you something, chances are whatever information they're presenting will be tilted in favor of their product.

5. Beware Bias

Reporters write a lot about politics, and there are plenty of political websites out there. But many of them are run by groups that have a bias in favor of one political party or philosophy. A conservative website isn't likely to report objectively on a liberal politician, and vice versa. Steer clear of sites with a political ax to grind and instead look for ones that are non-partisan. Also be careful of .org websites that are run by non-profit organizations whose information may not be objective. The Alabama Christian Organization will not have an objective view of abortion if your issue is teen pregnancy.

6. Check the Date

As a reporter you need for the most up-to-date information available, so if a website seems old, it's probably best to steer clear. One way to check - look for a "last updated" date on the page or site.

7. Look at the Site's Look

If a site looks poorly designed and amateurish, chances are it was created by amateurs. Steer clear. But be careful - just because a website is professionally designed doesn't mean it's reliable.

8. Avoid Anonymous Authors

Articles or studies whose authors are named are often - though not always - more reliable than works produced anonymously. It makes sense: If someone is willing to put their name on something they've written, chance are they stand by the information it contains. And if you have the name of the author, you can always Google him or her to check their credentials.

9. NO WIKIPEDIA