

# Website Investigator

## Handbook



# The 5 W's of Cyberspace

The old formula used by police, journalists and researchers for getting the "full" story can be applied in cyberspace, to help identify credible online information sources.

Ask yourself:

## **Who is the source of the information?**

- Has someone taken responsibility for the content of this Web site?
- Is information about the author or organization clearly stated?
- Are there any links to in-depth information about the author or organization?
- Can you contact the company or author through a real world postal address or phone number?
- Can you confirm that the company or author is a credible, authoritative source of information?
- Can you verify the authority of any of the site's content that is attributed to other sources?

## **What are you getting?**

### **Is the information biased in any way?**

- Does the site rely on loaded language or broad, unsubstantiated statements?
- Is emotion used as a means of persuasion?
- Does the site offer more than one viewpoint?
- Are there links to other or alternative viewpoints?

### **Does the site's information seem thorough and well organized?**

- Does the site clearly state the topics that it intends to address?
- Does it follow through on the information it has promised?
- Does the information seem complete? Consistent?
- Is the information well written and easy to understand?
- Does the Web site offer a list of further in-depth resources or links to such resources?
- What's the copyright status of material found on the site?

## **When was the site created?**

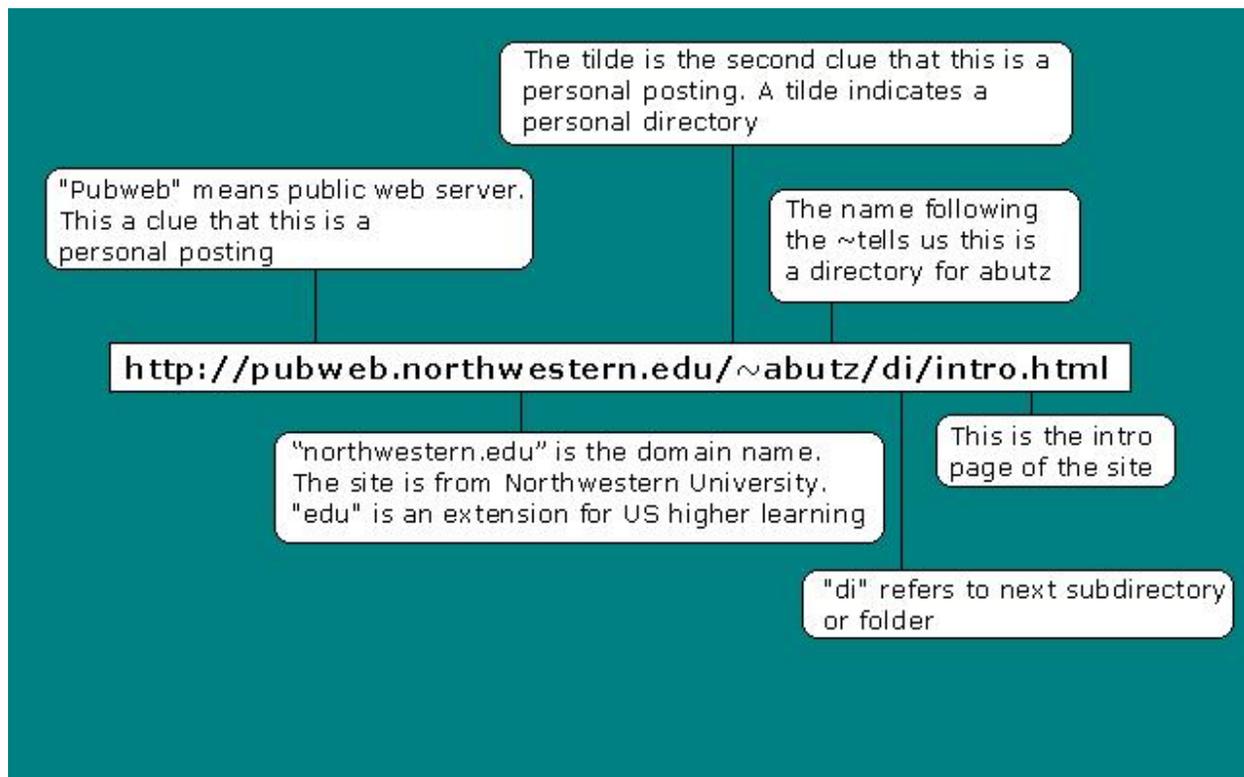
- Is it important that the information you are seeking be right up to date?
- Is a reference date provided to show when the material was put online, or when it was last updated?
- Do the links work?

## Where:

Learn to deconstruct a Uniform Resource Locator (better known as a URL or "site address").

What is the first thing you type when you need to access a website?

You type the website's address or as it is also called a URL or Uniform Resource Locator. The URL is kind of like a street address and it can tell you a lot of information. It tells the computer where the website is located.



Always ask yourself the 3 URL questions:

### **Question #1. Do you recognize the domain name?**

The domain name is found after the `http://` and `www.` to the first forward slash `/`. For example in the URL `www.novemberlearning.com`, `novemberlearning.com` is the domain name. A domain name can sometimes provide clues about the quality of information of a site or tell you what a site is about.

### **Question # 2. What is the extension in the domain name?**

`.com` and `.net` are examples of extensions. Extensions are an important part of domain names. You probably know quite a few already. Extensions are intended to show the type of establishment that owns and publishes the domain

### **Question # 3. Are you on a personal page?**

You may or may not recognize the domain name or extension of a URL. Keep reading past the first forward slash `/` for more clues. A personal page is a web site created by an individual. The web site may contain useful information, links to important resources and helpful facts, but sometimes these pages offer highly biased opinions. The presence of a name in the URL such as `jdoe` and a tilde `~` or `%` or the words "users," "people," or "members" frequently means you are on a personal web site

## **Why are you here?**

Before you saddle up and ride out into cyberspace, it's a good idea to stop and consider whether or not the Internet is even the best place to go.

Ask yourself:

- Can I get the information faster off-line?
- Does the online material I'm finding suit my needs?
- Am I able to verify this information?

## **How can you tell what's what?**

When in doubt, doubt. Skepticism should be the rule of thumb on the Net.

- Apply the five W's of cyberspace to the Web sites you visit.
- Double-check your facts and sources -- and then check them some more!
- Use *Meta-Web information searches* to assess the credibility of Web sites. This can be done by entering the author's name into a search engine to conduct a quick background check. Or you can find which sites link to a specific site by going to a search engine like Alta Vista and entering a "link:" command in the "Search" box, followed by the page's URL.

## **A final word of advice:**

You can't judge a Web site just by its code, however. Not all commercial sites will try to sell you something, but they warrant a different kind of scrutiny than those at a governmental site. Pages found on educational or non-profit organization Web servers can be extraordinarily diverse. Non-profits can be professional associations, seditious societies or silly groups. Educational web sites range from forums for sophomoric humor to clearinghouses for cutting edge articles on post-partum particle physics.

# COMMON EXTENSIONS

- .edu** Educational organization (most US universities)
- .k12** US school site (not all US schools use this)
- .ac** Academic institution (outside of US)
- .sch** School site (some schools outside of the US use this)
- .com** Company (usually .co in the UK)
- .org** Any organization
- .gov** Government agency
- .net** Network
- .mil** Military institution
- .biz,** Commercial purpose
- .info.** Commercial purpose
- .uk** United Kingdom (country specific extension)
- .jp** Japan (country specific extension)
- .ca** Canada (country specific extension)
- .au** Australia (country specific extension)
- (~)** Sometimes you might see a “user” reference or tilde (~) symbol in a sub directory, followed by a name. This indicates that you may be on a personal Web page that is being hosted by an ISP (Internet Service Provider).

# Checklist for Evaluating Web Resources

Is the Web a good research tool? This question is dependent on the researcher's objective. As in traditional print resources one must use a method of critical analysis to determine its value. Here is a checklist for evaluating web resources to help in that determination.

## Authority:

- Is the information reliable?
- Check the author's credentials and affiliation. Is the author an expert in the field?
- Does the resource have a reputable organization or expert behind it?
- Are the sources of information stated? Can you verify the information?
- Can the author be contacted for clarification?
- Check for organizational or author biases.

## Scope:

- Is the material at this site useful, unique, accurate or is it derivative, repetitious, or doubtful?
- Is the information available in other formats?
- Is the purpose of the resource clearly stated? Does it fulfill its purpose?
- What items are included in the resource? What subject area, time period, formats or types of material are covered?
- Is the information factual or opinion?
- Does the site contain original information or simply links?
- How frequently is the resource updated?
- Does the site have clear and obvious pointers to new content?

## Format and Presentation:

- Is the information easy to get to? How many links does it take to get to something useful?
- What is the quality of the graphical images? Do these images enhance the resource or distract from the content?
- Is the target audience or intended users clearly indicated?
- Is the arrangement of links uncluttered?
- Does the site have its own search engine?
- Is the site easily browsable or searchable?

## Cost and Accessibility:

- Is the site available on a consistent basis?
- Is response time fast?
- Does the site have a text-based alternative?
- How many links lead to a dead-end?
- Is this a fee-based site? Can non-members still have access to part of the site?
- Must you register a name and password before using the site?

## Other Tips:

- Check the header and footer information to determine the author and source.
- In the URL, a tilde ~ usually indicated a personal web directory rather than being part of the organization's official web site.
- In order to verify an author's credentials, you may need to consult some printed sources such as Who's Who in America or the Biography Index.
- Check and compare the web site to others which are both similar and different.

**#1) NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

With your partner, click on each of the links below and explore the site for a few minutes. Look for things that are the same about all four sites you are looking at and then be ready to share your answers to the questions below with the class.

<http://www.psu.edu>

<http://www.villanova.edu>

<http://www.juniata.edu>

<http://www.ciachef.edu>

**1. What is the same about the addresses of all of these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. What is the same about the content and information at all of these sites?**

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**3. What kind of organization owns these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**#2) NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

With your partner, click on each of the links below and explore the site for a few minutes. Look for things that are the same about all four sites you are looking at and then be ready to share your answers to the questions below with the class.

<http://www.amazon.com>

<http://www.yamaha.com>

<http://www.dell.com>

<http://www.time.com>

**1. What is the same about the addresses of all of these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. What is the same about the content and information at all of these sites?**

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**3. What kind of organization owns these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**#3.) NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

With your partner, click on each of the links below and explore the site for a few minutes. Look for things that are the same about all four sites you are looking at and then be ready to share your answers to the questions below with the class.

<http://www.centennialsd.org>

<http://www.musicforyouth.org>

<http://www.amazing-kids.org>

<http://www.girlscouts.org>

**1. What is the same about the addresses of all of these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. What is the same about the content and information at all of these sites?**

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**3. What kind of organization owns these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**#4.) NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

With your partner, click on each of the links below and explore the site for a few minutes. Look for things that are the same about all four sites you are looking at and then be ready to share your answers to the questions below with the class.

<http://www.ed.gov>

<http://www.nasa.gov>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov>

<http://www.uscourts.gov>

**1. What is the same about the addresses of all of these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. What is the same about the content and information at all of these sites?**

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**3. What kind of organization owns these sites?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**URL extension BINGO:**

**Use the extension handout and randomly fill out the squares with website extensions.**


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# **Are these websites for real?**

Use your investigating skills to validate these websites.

## **California's Velcro Crop under Challenge**

<http://home.inreach.com/kumbach/velcro.html>

Did you know about the Velcro shortage in California?

## **Dihydrogen Monoxide**

<http://www.dhmo.org/>

## **Dog Island Free Forever**

<http://www.thedogisland.com/>

A puppy dog paradise..

## **Feline Reactions to Bearded Men**

<http://improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html>

## **The Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus**

<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>

## **Victorian Robots**

<http://www.bigredhair.com/robots/index.html>