

Evaluating Material from the Internet

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to ensure that the material you find on the Internet is reliable. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Evaluating Internet Material
2. What Is Search Engine Bias?
3. Essential Questions to Ask When Evaluating Internet Material
 - a. The ADAM Approach
4. Domain Credibility
5. Social Media and Multimedia Sources

1. Evaluating Internet Material

The biggest advantage of using the Internet as a research tool is the ease with which you can find information.

The biggest disadvantage, then, is parsing through the bevy of information to find **credible**, reliable, accurate information.

The burden of filtering truth from fiction in your Internet searches lies solely with you as the researcher.



TERM TO KNOW

Credibility

The objective and subjective components of the believability of a source or message.

2. What Is Search Engine Bias?

The first thing to understand about using the Internet as a source of information is that search engines are biased gateways to the information you seek.

This bias may be driven by proprietary search algorithms dictated by corporate sponsors, ad revenue, and even politics, thus affecting the type of search results your queries will display.

Understand that just because you're searching for something on a popular search engine, it doesn't mean

3. Essential Questions to Ask When Evaluating Internet Material

When searching for reliable information on the Internet, there are several questions you should ask yourself with *each* source of information you find.

This may seem tedious, but you don't want your thesis to be undone by someone questioning the credibility of your research, or worse, you as a speaker.

3a. The ADAM Approach

The ADAM approach is an acronym to help you remember the four most important things to consider when evaluating the quality of your materials found via the Internet:

Age: How recent is the data or information presented in your source? When was the website last updated? Use only the most current information you can find.

Depth: Does your material go in depth with your subject or merely cover the basics? Are the details from scholarly or academic sources? Look for sources that go in depth rather than provide you with just an overview of your subject.

Author: Who wrote your source? What are their credentials? What makes them an authoritative expert on this subject? What biases might they have? Try to seek out impartial, authoritative experts when you can.

Money: Who funds the website? Is the website trying to sell you anything? Who advertises at the website? Where else might this website be advertised? Again, you'll want to seek out as many impartial sources as you can and you want to make sure that you fully investigate the transparency of any agenda a website might have.

4. Domain Credibility

Sometimes the clue to a website's authenticity and credibility is within the actual website address itself. The following top-level domains (TLD) can give you an idea of how reliable and accurate the information may be:

.com: The most popular TLD worldwide, originally used by commercial entities, now a de facto standard on the Internet. Reliability and credibility not always guaranteed.

.edu: Only schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions can use this TLD, often indicating a reliable source of information.

.gov: Only government organizations may use this TLD. Guaranteed to be both accurate and credible.

.org: Originally reserved for non-profit organizations (NPO) or non-government organizations (NGO), this TLD can be used by commercial entities. In 2012, a .ngo TLD has been added to the Internet Corporation for

Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) as a domain extension.

.net: Primarily used by internet service providers. Depending on what kind of information you're looking for, sites with a .net TLD may or may not provide you with any useful information.

5. Social Media and Multimedia Sources

Audio, video, and multimedia materials that have been recorded, then broadcast, distributed, or archived by a reputable party may also meet the necessary criteria to be considered reliable sources.

Like text sources, media sources must be produced by a reliable third party and be properly cited. Additionally, an archived copy of the media must exist. It is convenient, but by no means necessary, for the archived copy to be accessible via the Internet.

The rapid growth of social media and its ability to disseminate relevant information to multiple users based on shared interests and relationships has increased its importance in the world of Internet research. Wikipedia, one of the most popular wiki websites in the world, relies on scholarly material and crowdsourcing to provide accurate, targeted, and comprehensive information to the masses.

When using social media sources, researchers should be aware of sites that have a poor reputation for checking facts or for moderating content. Such sources also attract publishers expressing extremist views, promoting products, or posting false and inaccurate information.

For that reason, self-published media - whether e-books, newsletters, open wikis, blogs, social networking pages, Internet forum postings, or tweets - should be used with caution. Self-published material may be acceptable when it has been produced by an established expert on the topic at hand, and whose work in the relevant field has been previously published by reliable third-party publications.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that failure to accurately **evaluate your Internet sources** leaves you and your speech subject to intense scrutiny and questions of credibility. While you may not realize it, even **search engines can have bias** in the results they choose to display. **The ADAM approach** (age, depth, author, and money) can help you **ask essential questions** to determine whether or not you should proceed with using a particular source. Looking at a website's top-level **domain** can give you clues about its reliability. Generally speaking, it's safe to trust information from sites with domain names that end in .edu, .gov and .ngo, and sometimes .org. When using and evaluating **social media sources**, researchers should be aware of sites that have a poor reputation for checking facts or moderating content.

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