

So, how can you tell if a website is reliable?

Using the Internet to find information is like going on a treasure hunt You could find some real gems, but you could also end up in some strange and dangerous places!

When you visit a website, you'll want to ask the following questions:

- **Who runs the site?** A good website will indicate who is responsible for the content. Government agencies and universities tend to be less biased and provide high quality information. Keep in mind that news media sites can be very biased.
- **Why have they created the site and what do they want from you?** Is it for the sale of a product or is it strictly educational training? Is the goal to have you buy something? On Pet Education, for example, they provide some useful information about animals but the site also contains a lot of advertisement about dog food.

Some sites will ask for personal information. Make sure you know what they are going to do with it. There are a number of sites that require you to have a log in which is ok. Just make sure you know if there are any associated costs. Right now there are plenty of free websites to reference, so the need to pay for information is usually not necessary. One example of a resource that you have to pay for is the New England Journal of Medicine. This journal does require you to purchase a subscription for some of the newer articles. However, you can access a number of the older ones at no cost. **Note:** NAU Online Library provides **FREE** access to NEJM articles more than 3-months old.

- **Who is paying for the site?** Does the site's information favor the sponsor? Check out any and all information. Are they biased and do they promote one particular thing or person?

- **Is the information reviewed by experts and current?** Posted articles should be followed by references and authors, dates, and websites should be clearly identified. Posted articles should also be reviewed and revised or replaced as new information comes out.
- **How is information on the site selected?** Has the posted material been reviewed by experts in the field or by an editorial board?

Answering each of these questions gives you clues about the quality of the information on the site.

You can usually find the answers on the main page or the “About Us” page of a website. Site maps may also be helpful. When you first pull up a website, two places to start looking for answers are at the top of the page and at the bottom.

The top-level domain part of the website’s address will give you more clues to consider.

- .edu are education related websites
- .org are nonprofit organizations
- .net are networking and business organizations
- .gov are governmental
- .mil are U.S. military organizations
- .com are commercial sites (**Caution: these sites will require more scrutiny to make sure they meet the necessary criteria.**)

Note: .gov and .edu sites are more likely to pass the tests of being quality websites.

As an example, consider these two imaginary sites:

Physicians Academy for Better Health

Diseases & Conditions Diet & Nutrition Exercise Medication & Treatment

ADVERTISEMENT
Regular exercise is important for people of all ages.

Genetics may explain why some people can lower their cholesterol by altering their diet and exercise habits while others who take similar measures do not see significant decreases.

A study comparing the cholesterol levels of twins with starkly different body types and exercise habits found that the twins showed

What the Numbers Mean
Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

Total	Category

This site:

- is run by experts
- has a clearly stated purpose
- labels advertising
- reviews information before posting it
- explains the sources of data and research
- is up-to-date
- will not share personal information

Institute for a Healthier Heart

"Helping families live healthier lives since 1995"

Blood Pressure Cholesterol Heart Disease

Latest Heart News

[Treating Sleep Apnea Reduces Heart Disease Deaths](#)

[Low-Level Jobs Linked with Faster, Less Variable Heart Rates](#)

Learn how a [revolutionary new drug](#) can help your heart!

This site:

- does not explain who is running it
- may favor its sponsor
- has an unclear purpose
- does not label advertising
- does not describe how information is added
- does not identify the sources of information
- does not tell how old the information is
- might share your personal information with others

The Physicians Academy for Better Health Web site is more likely to be a reliable source of information.

After looking at the above sites consider

After reviewing the above websites reconsider the following:

Provider

- Who is in charge of the website?
- Why are they providing the site?
- Can you contact them?

Funding

- Where does the money to support the site come from?
- Does the site have advertisements? Are they labeled as such?

Quality

- Where does the information on the site come from?
- Do experts review the information that goes on the site? What are their qualifications?
- Does the site avoid unbelievable or emotional claims?
- Is it up-to-date?

Privacy

- Does the site ask for your personal information?
- Do they tell you how it will be used?
- Are you comfortable with how it will be used?

Asking questions will help you find quality websites. But there is no guarantee that the information is perfect.

Make sure that you check with your instructor on what references you are allowed to use before submitting your paper. Many instructors will only allow you to use one reference that is not from a scholarly journal or 'refereed.' That means that all of your other references will have to be obtained from a '**juried,**' '**refereed,**' '**peer-reviewed,**' or '**scholarly**' site (**note: not all scholarly journals are peer-reviewed.**)

What does this mean? Generally the terms ‘juried,’ ‘peer-reviewed,’ and ‘refereed’ are interchangeable and refer to articles or websites that go through a professional editorial process which includes an impartial review and approval by peers who are recognized as experts in the field. A scholarly journal is one that has articles written by scholars or researchers. These articles generally include reports on original research, theory, or experimentation. The article will include footnotes and bibliographies that cite the author’s sources. These articles can usually be found on university websites, academic websites, or professional organization web pages.

Where can I go to find the appropriate references?

- Databases like [EBSCO](#). This site allows you to limit your search results to scholarly or peer-reviewed journals. Other databases, like Web of Science, only cover scholarly journals.
- [Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory](#). This site includes a list of refereed journals as well as information about refereed status in the title information.
- [Google Scholar](#) is a way to restrict your web search to those websites that are scholarly in focus. Remember this is **just a starting point**, not all resources found on this site are juried. It is not a comprehensive resource and doesn’t provide very much free full text.
- [Scholarly databases in the NAU Online Library](#)

How do I know if the article or website is ‘juried’??

- Look at the instructions to authors in the journal itself. If the articles are sent out for review before acceptance, it is a peer reviewed journal. In print journals, this information is usually inside the front cover.
- Look in databases. Most databases have a method to narrow your search, or an advanced search option. A few of the more common databases are listed above.
- Review the information on finding a reliable website.
- If in doubt, [check with your librarian](#).

