Is this resource reliable?

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April 28, 2018, at ACES 2018
Who am I?

@gerrrib on Twitter
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• Editorial adviser, University Daily Kansan
• Teaches editing and media ethics at KU
• Copy editor for 36-plus years
• Board member of the American Copy Editors Society
• Did research on fact-checking and verification while at the University of Missouri School of Journalism
• Can mention KU and MU on the same slide without fear.
Verification begins with questions

Writers and editors asking:

• How do we know this?
• Who said this and how do they know?
• What is the source of this information?
Take some advice from the NIH
Take some advice from the NIH
(it’s good advice for editors, too)
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The National Institute of Health on finding and evaluating health resources online:

- **Who** runs or created the site? Can you trust them?
- **What** is the site promising or offering? Do its claims seem too good to be true?
- **When** was its information written or reviewed?
- **Where** does the information come from? Is it based on scientific research?
- **Why** does the site exist? Is it selling something?

Source: https://nccih.nih.gov/health/webresources#hed3
How to evaluate a website

1. Make friends with the “About” page.
   Who runs the website? Do they have an agenda? Or is it difficult to find out who runs it? (Beware!)
The Daily Currant is an English language online satirical newspaper that covers global politics, business, technology, entertainment, science, health and media. It is accessible from over 190 countries worldwide - now including South Sudan.

Our mission is to ridicule the timid ignorance which obstructs our progress, and promote intelligence - which presses forward.

Q. Are your news stories real?

A. No. Our stories are purely fictional. However they are meant to address real-world issues through satire and often refer and link to real events happening in the world.
How to check a website

2. Look at the URL. Is it unusual? Does something strike you as wrong?
How to check a website

Here’s the real ABC News website
How to check a website

3. Does the website clearly show who the author is?
Better yet, are there links to the author’s contact information?
How to check a website

4. What does the website design look like? Does it look professional? Does it look trustworthy?

There are still trustworthy sites with simple looks, but if a site looks like it was designed in 1999, you should stop and think about it before using it.
An example

Here are two paragraphs from an unedited story on home-schooled athletes. The reporter even provided a link to the figure quoted.

Some home-schooled students fall outside the Missouri State High School Activities Association, the governing body for high school activities in Missouri, preventing them from participating in high school activities. Around 600 high schools, both public and private, participate in more than 20 championship-level MSHSAA-sponsored activities.

In Missouri, about 3 percent of the school-aged population was home-schooled in 2011-12.

The link goes to http://a2zhomeschooling.com/. Let’s check its About page.
What does this page say to you?

A2Z Homeschool – THE A-to-Z of Homeschooling

Ann Zeise Contact Information And Faqs

How to Contact Your Homeschooling Guide

I’m a real person. I really am a currently "retired," homeschooling parent in Milpitas, California, (near San Jose) and homeschooled from 1993 – 2003. You can read more about me in this biography published in the California HomeSchooler.

Meet Ann Zeise: Home’s Cool from A
How to check a website

5. Is the information up-to-date.
(Not every old website will be as easy to spot as Dole/Kemp 96.)
How to check a website

There’s no sure-fire way to know when a site was last updated, but these tips can help:
How to check a website

Check for post dates or other date clues on the page.

Sometimes post dates can be difficult to find and many sites don’t use them.
How to check a website

Check the URL to see if it contains a date.

This one contains a year:

This one contains a full date:
http://www.whig.com/20180422/your-turnsharon-nicholl
How to check a website

Sometimes you can use a javascript command, but it doesn’t work with pages where content is generated dynamically.

Open the page and replace the ULR with Javascript:document.lastModified
How to check a website

For websites that generate content dynamically, try checking the Internet Archive (Wayback Machine) at https://archive.org/web/:
How to check a website

When in doubt, for information you can’t find elsewhere, contact the author.
Make your verified list

Some examples on my list of trusted online resources:


Library of Congress: https://www.loc.gov/

National Archives: https://www.archives.gov/

State “Blue Books” (print and online)

National Geographic Atlas of the World (print); also maps.nationalgeographic.com/maps
Make your verified list

Some examples on my list of trusted online resources:

Google Books

WolframAlpha.com

http://refdesk.com/ (looks old, but has lots of trusted links; but check each separately)

New York Times Newsroom Navigator
A lot of this is old. It was updated in 2007. But it points to many good resources)

Encyclopedia Britannica https://www.britannica.com/
Make your verified list

Expand knowledge by swapping lists. (Just be sure to verify each site on your own.)

What are some of your favorite trusted online resources?
Beware:

Some websites are helpful but with a caveat.


Includes both public records (good) and user-generated info (iffy)
Also consider

Look for the original source material.

• Is it a document? Can you get it?
• Is it a quote? Where did the person who said it get the information?
• Is it a study? Where did the information in the study come from?
Treat online quotes with suspicion

THE PROBLEM WITH QUOTES FOUND ON THE INTERNET IS THAT THEY ARE OFTEN NOT TRUE.

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Use an accuracy checklist

Use checklists; have one for each job.

COPY EDITING CHECKLIST

**Critical editing**

1. Does the story make sense?
2. Are all of the major questions answered?
3. Is the story fair? Who or what might be missing?
4. Is the background complete enough that all readers will have a sense of relevance?
5. Are there any sensitivity issues in either individual word usage or description?
6. Do links go to something that is relevant to the story and that answers the questions raised? Are the links from a trusted source of information? Are there any bias issues with the links?

**Accuracy checks**

1. Are the names correct? Are they spelled the same in every instance? (Check against headlines, cutlines, other display text.)
2. Are the ages and dates correct?
3. Are the titles correct — check for people, but also for businesses, institutions, books, works of art, etc.
4. Are the locations, addresses correct?
5. Did you check the phone numbers against directories or call the numbers?
6. DID YOU DO THE MATH?
7. Did you check website URLs to make sure they work?
8. Did you check the links to make sure they work?
Accuracy checklist best practices

• Determine what needs to be on the checklist.
Accuracy checklist best practices

- Determine what needs to be on the checklist.
- If your organization has a policy to do accuracy checks with sources, determine in advance how much of the article a source can see before publication.
- Don’t rely on seeing ACs or CQs in copy. People still make mistakes, so spot check — and check anything that sounds wrong.
In summary:

• Being skeptical helps you ensure accuracy. Ask where did this come from and how do we know it.

• Know how to check the trustworthiness of a website.

• Develop a list of reliable resources and look for original material to check against.

• Be wary of user-generated material on the Internet.

• Consider using an accuracy checklist.

• More on accuracy checklists and resource lists at: gberendzen.com