

Support Tools for Leading a Discussion About Online Sources

- What is credibility?
***CREDIBILITY**, noun 1. the condition of being credible or believable.¹*
- What's a quick way to determine the credibility of an online source?
 - *Has the author cited his or her sources? Do I find them credible?*
 - *When was the website last updated?*
 - *Does the site provide comprehensive information on the topic?*
 - *Do the site's hyperlinks work?*
- Ask students to name the criteria they think support the credibility of an online source. You can jot down the students' answers on the board and, if you wish, work with them to develop a credibility checklist.

Examples of questions to foster discussion with students:

- *When you're working on homework or a school project, what type of site do you use for your research?*
- *Why do you use these sites over others?*
- *How do you know whether these websites are reliable for your research?*
- *How can you tell a credible site from one that is not?*

Examples of criteria that may support the credibility of an online site:

- Domain name
 - *.com* → a domain that used to be reserved for businesses; today anyone can use this domain
 - *.net* → a domain that used to be reserved for network resources; today anyone can use this domain
 - *.org* → a domain that used to be reserved for associations; today anyone can use this domain
 - *.edu* → a domain reserved for educational institutions
 - *.gouv.qc.ca* → a domain reserved for the Québec government
 - *.gc.ca* → a domain reserved for the Canadian government
- The author is known (recognized competency or reputation)

¹ *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. Second edition. Katherine Barber, Ed. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press (2004). p. 356.

- The organization is known to the public
- The organization is a public one rather than a private one
- The source's objectives or intention are clear
- The information is specific, relevant and current
- Sources or references have been cited (referral to a recognized authority)
- The topics addressed on the website are associated with the organization's field of operation
- The organization or business is neutral as regards the topics addressed on the site (impartiality)
- The statements found on the site are congruent (no contradictions)
- The texts are well written and contain no mistakes
- Care has been taken with the site's appearance (visuals)
- The site is completed and available, rather than under construction
- You can contact the author, organization or business
- The site is not trying to sell you a product or service and there is no advertising

Examples of questions that students can ask to assess the credibility of a website:²

- *Who is the site's author?*
- *What is the site's domain name? What does it mean?*
- *What is the intention of the site's author?*
- *What audience is the site trying to reach?*
- *Does the author present more than one point of view?*
- *What do I know about the author that suggests he or she is an expert on the topic?*

² Based on www.archipel.uqam.ca/6125/1/M12960.pdf.