Can I Use This Website in College-Level Research?

Is there an author?

A person

- Look for credentials:
  - Job
  - Experience
  - Publications
  - Academic degrees (M.D., PhD, etc.) or academic affiliation

An organization

- Can be an organization (.org), company (.com), or government agency (.gov)
- Look for mission or purpose:
  - “About” or “About [name of organization]”
- Look for contact info
- Look for Board of Directors or staff list and their qualifications
- Be sure to check for bias in the organization (Hint: read through the site to discover any slant or agenda.)

Are sources documented?

- Look for a list of citations or links in the text to original sources.
- Use original source when possible.

Who sponsors the site?

- Look at bottom of page for copyright information
  - Examples: Copyright 2017 the American National Red Cross
  - ©2017 The New York Times Company

- Media outlets (newspapers, magazines, television) are usually considered reliable.
- Government sites are considered reliable.

Is there a date?

- Best: Date last updated or Date revised
- Okay: Date created

- The copyright date can be used in your citation if there is no other date, but it does not necessarily mean that page or site is current as of that date.

If you cannot identify an author, sponsor, and date, do not use the web site!
Also evaluate:

- **Purpose:** Is it to inform, persuade, entertain, sell?
- **Point of View:** Is the site one-sided? Is it biased? Is the information provided fact or opinion?
- **Address:** .edu and .gov sites are considered most reliable.
  - .org sites may have a bias.
  - .com sites are commercial; use with caution.

**Looking for Scholarly Sources?**

A **scholarly search engine** retrieves academic articles, reports, and books.

Google Scholar – Searches for journal articles and books. Fees or subscriptions may be required for some articles. http://scholar.google.com

Full-text articles are free through databases.

**How is the Web Different from an Online Database?**

Information on the Web

- Freely available to anyone with Internet access
- Anyone can put information on the Internet
- You must evaluate what you find, especially when using it for college-level research

Online Databases

- Are a source of articles and reference information to which the library subscribes
- Information in databases has gone through an editorial process
- Most databases provide a citation for the source (although the citation may contain errors)
- The information is credible and authoritative – perfect for college-level research!

**Citing Web Sites:**

Ask for “**MLA Style Guide,**” “**APA Style Guide,**” and “**Chicago Style: Humanities**” handouts

- Available in paper on the reference side of the library
- Available online on the “Research Tools” link on the library’s home page

Ask a reference librarian for good sites on a particular subject.

Remember – not all information is on the web! Use the library online catalog and databases, too.