

Evaluating Websites for Research

As you research a topic or subject, you need to evaluate each source, to determine its credibility.

These are some points to help you decide if a website will give you the type of information you need.

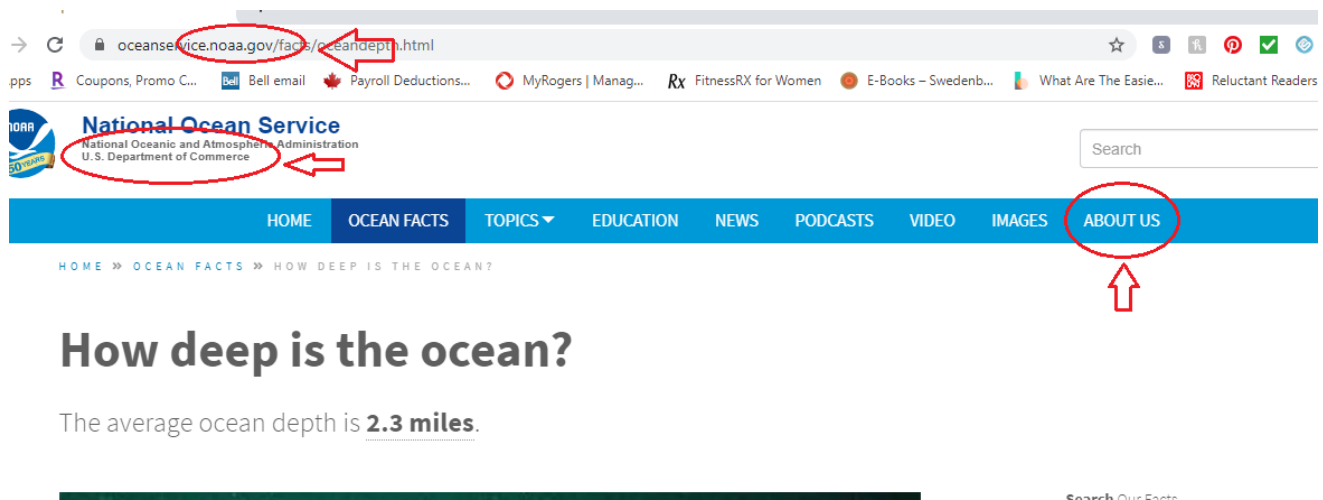
1. Determine if the website is a good fit for you and your project.

- ✓ Can you read and understand it? Is the reading level comfortable?
- ✓ Is the information age appropriate or uncomfortable?
- ✓ Are there ads that not age appropriate?
- ✓ Is the information related to your research question?

2. Authorship

Who is the person, group of people or organization responsible for creating the information on the site?

- ✓ Is the author an expert on the subject? Do they work or have education in the field that you are researching?
- ✓ How many years of experience or what education do they have in the field?
- ✓ With what organization or institution (if any) do they work for or represent?
- ✓ Look for the words “about” or “info” which may include author information.



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the NOAA National Ocean Service website. The address bar shows the URL oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/oceandepth.html. The page header includes the NOAA logo and the text "National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce". A search bar is visible on the right. The navigation menu at the top includes links for HOME, OCEAN FACTS, TOPICS, EDUCATION, NEWS, PODCASTS, VIDEO, IMAGES, and ABOUT US. The "ABOUT US" link is circled in red, with a red arrow pointing to it from below. Below the navigation menu, the breadcrumb trail reads "HOME » OCEAN FACTS » HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN?". The main heading is "How deep is the ocean?" and the text below it states "The average ocean depth is **2.3 miles**."

3. Objectivity

Objectivity has to do with whether or not the information is presented in a fair and balanced way, by offering different points of view. For example, is the website trying to sell a product or service? If so, the website has bias – it will present information to sway you into buying what they are trying to sell you.

Bias is not always obvious so you the information on a website to decide whether or not it's giving you both sides of the story.

Opinion – based

Articles and websites are based on personal opinions, thoughts, or beliefs.

Fact-based

Articles, reports and studies are good examples of fact-based sources.

4. Purpose

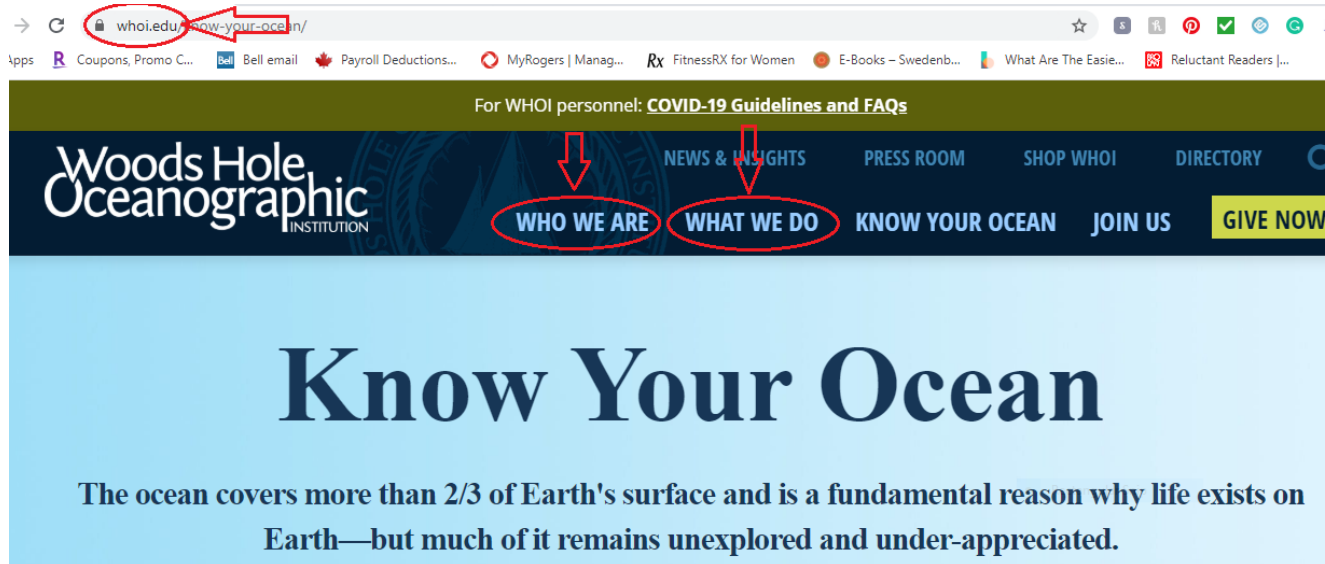
What is the reason the author is posting the information? Does the website make it's purpose clear?

Generally there are four purposes to a website:

- To sell something
- To entertain
- To persuade (sway public opinion)
- To inform

One way to determine the purpose of the site is to look at, or the end of the url / web address.

- ✓ .org is usually an not-for-profit organization– they could be good or could be biased.
- ✓ .edu is educational
- ✓ .gov is government
- ✓ .com is commercial sites, can be a business, commercial site trying to sell something usually with the intent to sell a product. It can also be used for personal sites for known people like authors.



The screenshot shows a web browser with the address bar containing 'whoi.edu/know-your-ocean/'. The website header includes the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution logo and navigation links: NEWS & INSIGHTS, PRESS ROOM, SHOP WHOI, DIRECTORY, WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO, KNOW YOUR OCEAN, JOIN US, and GIVE NOW. The main content area features the title 'Know Your Ocean' and the text: 'The ocean covers more than 2/3 of Earth's surface and is a fundamental reason why life exists on Earth—but much of it remains unexplored and under-appreciated.'

The best sites for research are the ones with a purpose to inform – it will give unbiased and objective information. Educational or government sites are more likely to proven trustworthy as their main purpose is to inform.

5. Accuracy

Is the on the website correct and true? For research, you want to stick to facts – what has been proven to be “true”

Look for sources that are **fact-based** sources as opposed to **opinion-based** sources.

Fact-based will be based on facts that have been proven. Examples are research studies or statistics

Look for signs that indicate whether the information is correct:

- ✓ *Cited* sources or references are great for research because it shows where the author found the information. Also, you can check the information on the different sites that were cited and check the information from the different cites, against each other.
- ✓ Does the source add to your knowledge of the topic or does it back up information? Finding information that is the same in multiple sources validates the accuracy of the information and helps you build a strong argument.

6. Timeliness

Is the information on the website is current and up to date **as the topic needs?**

People can view and talk about topics differently, at different periods in time. Technology and science are examples of how information can change over time

- ✓ What is the date that the article or website was published or last updated? Generally, keep to using sources that 10 years old or under.
- ✓ If there are links to other websites, check to see if they are still active. Inactive links can mean a website is outdated.
- ✓ If you cannot find newer information on your topic, it may be that that the topic does not change often.