Evaluating Websites for Research

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

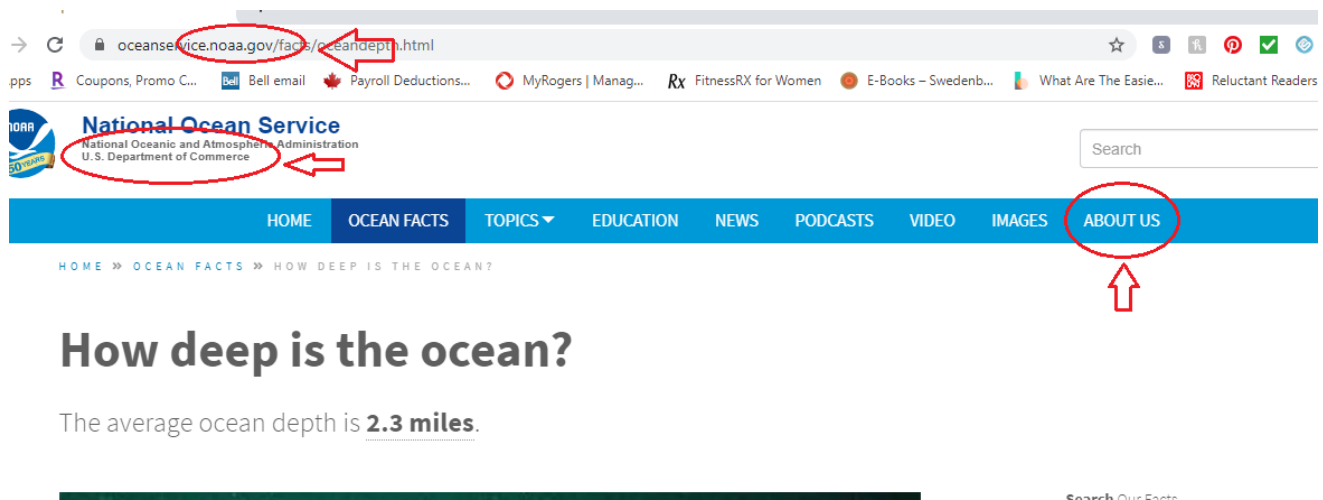These are some points to help you decide if a website will give you the type of information you need.

1. Determine of 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.

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.

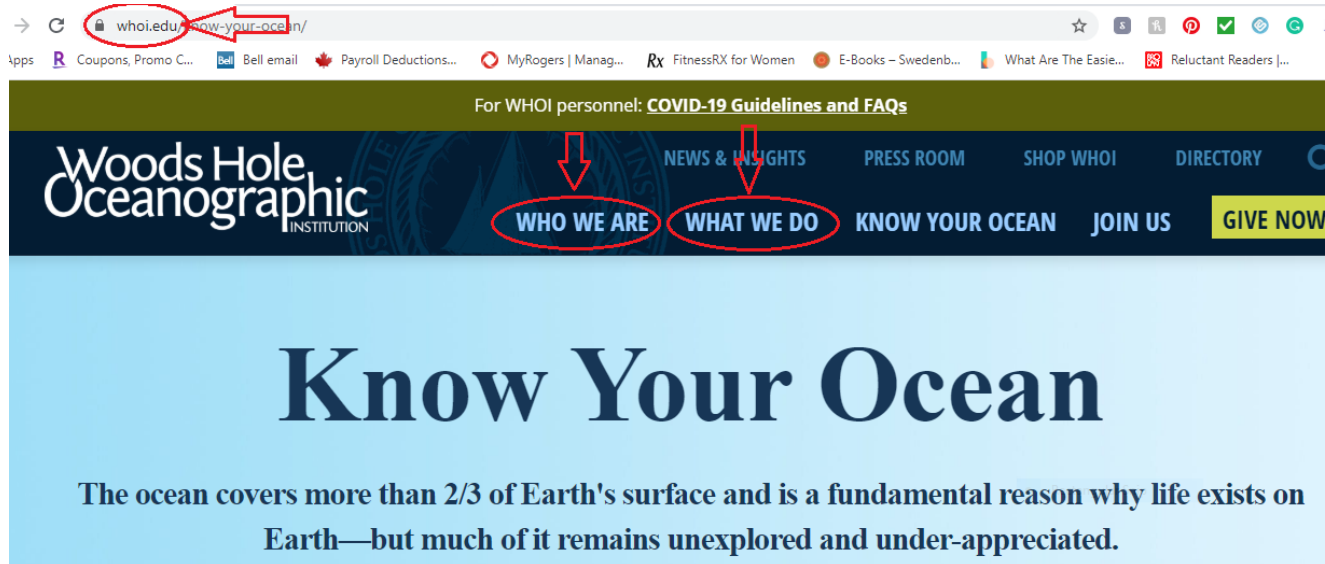| **Opinion – based**	**Fact-based**
Articles and websites are based on personal opinions, thoughts, or beliefs.	Articles, reports and studies are good examples of fact-based sources.

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 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.