Evaluating Online Resources
Before you start

Before studying this unit, you should have a good appreciation of how to phrase a precise research question and use advanced search engine tools to refine your online search.

You can find out more about this in the Oxlibris unit on Effective Online Searches.
Evaluating online resources

The internet can be a fantastic source of readily accessible information, but not all of it is accurate. It’s important to evaluate online resources in the same way you look critically at any information.
Asking Questions

It can be hard to judge whether information on a website is real or fake but you can ask yourself some questions:

• Where is the information from?
• Are there references for this information?
• Has the information been checked?
• What is the purpose of this information?
Where is the information from?

To find out who made a site, look for an “About” page or information at the bottom of the home page.

Fact-checking site **fullfact.org** an ‘about’ menu at the top:

And information at the foot of the page:

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Where is the information from?

The web address can be a clue.

In the UK, addresses ending `.ac.uk` are academic institutions.

In other countries, these addresses may end `.edu`
Would you trust this site?

Navigate to this site: oumnh.ox.ac.uk

What information can you find about this organisation?

Would you trust information from this site?
Would you trust this site?

We can trust this website because:

• The ‘.ox.ac.uk’ web address shows that it is part of an established academic institution
• We can easily find it’s location and contact details
• We can see the purpose of the museum
• We can see who funds the museum
• We can find out who works there and writes web content
Are there references?

• Can you find and check original sources of information?
• Have the sources been quoted accurately and fully?
• Having read them, do you trust the website’s analysis?

See if you can find a reference. It might be a link to another site, or the name of a book or article the information has come from. Now follow the clues.
Are there references?

This extract about Stonehenge is from the English Heritage website. We can see two references.

BEFORE STONEHENGE

The earliest structures known in the immediate area are four or five pits, three of which appear to have held large pine ‘totem-pole like’ posts erected in the Mesolithic period, between 8500 and 7000 BC. It is not known how these posts relate to the later monument of Stonehenge. [1]

At this time, when much of the rest of southern England was largely covered by woodland, the chalk downland in the area of Stonehenge may have been an unusually open landscape. It is possible that this is why it became the site of an early Neolithic monument complex. [2]
Following up references

Click on links, or try to find the source of the information. There is a reference list at the foot of the Stonehenge page.

FOOTNOTES


Navigate to the page and follow the reference link:
https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/history-and-stories/history/

Is source 2 credible? Is it used accurately?
Has information been checked?

If something is published in an academic journal then it is usually reliable because it has been peer-reviewed. This means it has been read and checked by a researcher who is knowledgeable in that area.

Assertions made online don’t have this guarantee but may have been double checked by fact-checking organisations.
Fact Checking

In March 2020 a video circulated that claimed citizens in Wuhan were tearing down 5G masts to control coronavirus.

This was shared by some celebrities on social media.

How could you check if this is true?
Fact Checking

We have several reasons to be cautious:

• Celebrities are not the best sources of information

• There is no reference or source shown

However, the video does show people attacking a structure.
A visit to the fact-checking website snopes.com reveals the truth:

As for the video displayed above, the footage comes from August 2019 (before the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China) and shows anti-surveillance protesters tearing down a “smart” lamppost in Hong Kong.

Here's the original video from the Guardian:
What is the purpose?

Always think about why information has been put online. What is the intent of the website, or the author? Is it to educate? Entertain? Persuade? Sell?

Always look closely at any adverts. Could the people who pay to advertise have influence over the site content? Could content have been altered or omitted to favour an advertiser?
Purpose of these sites?
Purpose of these sites?

News about Scotland

Campaigning wildlife charity

Caribbean heritage museum

Local government information
Online resource checklist

- Who made the website?
  Look for an ‘About’ page. Is this a reputable source? What is the purpose?

- Does the site have advertisements?
  Could advertisers be influencing the site content?

- Is this information up to date?
  When was the website last updated?

- Where has this information come from?
  Look for references. There may be links to sources.
Use the handy [EPQ Study Guide – Evaluating online resources](#)

Learn how to spot fake news with these videos:
[https://youtu.be/AkwWcHekMdo](https://youtu.be/AkwWcHekMdo)
[https://youtu.be/cSKGa_7XJkq](https://youtu.be/cSKGa_7XJkq)

Use a fact-checking website:
[https://fullfact.org/](https://fullfact.org/) Focuses on the UK
[https://www.factcheck.org/](https://www.factcheck.org/) US Politics
[https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/](https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/) Mainly US, but also international coverage.
[https://www.politifact.com/](https://www.politifact.com/) Truth-o-meter ratings from ‘True’ to ‘Pants on Fire!’