Checklist for Evaluating Web Sites

Web sources are especially important to evaluate and sometimes require some extra work to do so. (Note that periodical articles obtained through a library database are not “true” web sources, but print sources that have been made available electronically. They should be evaluated as you would a print version.)

- Can you identify the author of the document? Look for the name(s) of individual(s) and/or organization(s). Snoop around as needed: sometimes author info or links are at the top of a page, sometimes at the bottom. Follow links or move up the tree structure embedded in the URL.

- Does the document or site provide any information about the credentials of the author or the purpose and personnel of the organization? Look for an “About Us” page, Mission Statement, or other links; look for these on the home page if you don’t see them on the page you are on. If no information is given, see if you can learn something about the individual or organization some other way.
  ⇒ The less you know about the author, the less you should trust the information.
  ⇒ What you do learn should influence whether you trust the information, and whether you are alert to bias.

- Is contact information given? Is this only an email address, or is there also a phone number or physical location?
  ⇒ Be more skeptical of sites that don’t have this information.

- What kind of site is this? Check the .edu, .gov, .org, .com part of the URL. What is the purpose of the organization hosting the page you are interested in? What is the relationship between the author of the page and the hosting site? Is it an official page? Personal?
  ⇒ With .org sites, be especially attentive to the purpose of the organization. With .edu sites, try to find out who the author is and what their connection to the institution is.
  ⇒ Sites ending in .com.co are often “fake news” sites, mimicking legitimate news organizations.

- Look around for dates: date the document was written or posted and date of last update.

- Look for links or references to sources for the information.
  ⇒ If sources are given, that adds to the credibility of the site; they also provide you with additional resources, which may be preferable, closer-to-primary sources.