

Reliable Sources

The Internet has plenty of places to find information, but not all of them are created equal. Some are reliable, but some may be trying to persuade you or sell you things and some are just jokes.

You can find out if a site is useful and trustworthy by asking yourself the following questions:

Is the website's purpose:

- to give information?
- to entertain me or persuade me about something?
- to sell me something?
- to make fun of something?
- just a joke?

One way to find out is to look at the kinds of words that are used.

For example, here's a headline from a humorous site called *The Onion*: "Michelle Obama Seen Outside Walking Family Rhinoceros". Compare this with a headline from the *New York Times*: "Michelle Obama Confronts Heckler at Fund-Raiser". Which seems more likely to be for real?

Next you want to find out if someone has taken responsibility for what is written there. Is an author's name listed? When no author has taken responsibility for what is written, it makes it difficult to find someone to answer questions about the information on the website.

Does the website offer more than one point of view (what someone thinks about the issue) or links to other points of view?

For example, blogs will often only show the point of view of the people who write them, while websites belonging to universities will usually have many links to other research and opinions.

Can the information be proven from other sources?

For example, many UFO websites have stories of sightings where only one person saw a UFO. It doesn't always mean that this information is wrong or false, but it means you are relying completely on that person's honesty and memory.

Does the site show when the information was created and last updated?

In general, the older the information, the more chances it is less reliable (this is especially true of scientific information). How much should you trust medical advice that is more than 40 years old?

An easier way to remember how to check if a website is reliable is to look for PROOF:

Purpose – why was the site made?

Responsibility – can you tell who made the site and wrote the text?

Other views – does it give more than one side of the story?

Other sources – does it give proof of what it is saying?

Find a date – is it fairly recent? Does that matter for this topic?

