

Can I Trust It?

Because the media is ultra-present in our lives, we need to wear filters to understand the context of the sources. Good information fuels good business decisions. Lately, it has been easy to call something “fake news” if we disagree with it, but unless we take a moment to explain why sources are not trustworthy, we might just be fostering ignorance. The working world still values the truth and clear communication even while there seems to be more versions of the truth than ever. And this is not a climate in which one can continue to play dumb. In the workplace, you can’t just “believe” in something without having the ability to back it up. And you can’t just back it up with other people’s unfounded claims.

So how do we make sense out of the clutter? There are some shortcuts. The easiest way to prove legitimacy of a source is to look at the ending of the URL or web address.

Generally, websites in the U.S. have one of the suffixes below at the end of their domain name which typically means the following:

- .com = commercial use, the most popular
- .net = commercial use, less popular
- .org = used to identify nonprofit organizations
- .gov = U.S. government
- .mil = U.S. military
- .edu = U.S. education

The most trustworthy and objective are .gov (because the government should not be purposefully misleading) and .edu (because information on these sites is typically checked and often peer-reviewed and approved by educators). But a simple suffix doesn’t tell the whole story behind a source.

Other strategies take a little more critical thinking which require us to weigh the legitimacy of the source and use our informed judgment.

For example, if you needed the schedule for your upcoming basketball game, would you double-check the schedule sent to you by a member of your arch rival? Similarly, when purchasing a product, how do you make a decision? If you use reviews, how much can you trust those reviews and what criteria do you use to tell you whether the reviews are honest? Have you seen [the story on a fake restaurant in London](#) that went to number one on Trip Advisor?

Would you believe what the seller tells you in an advertisement? How about when you are researching the environmental dangers of coal? Would you use comments from the head of a coal company to build your own argument? Remember, just because it’s on the Internet doesn’t make it true.

Go to one or more of the following sources and follow the questionnaire to finally decide whether the information and source is trustworthy.

- Usability.gov (<http://www.usability.gov>)
- Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu>)
- Quackwatch (<http://www.quackwatch.com/>)
- NewsBusters (<http://www.newsbusters.org/>)
- Daily Kos (<http://dailykos.com/>)
- Bits (<http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/>)
- Everything2 (<http://everything2.com/>)
- H2G2 (<http://www.h2g2.com/>)
- Encyclopedia Mythica (<http://www.pantheon.org/>)
- Anne's Anti-Quackery and Science Blog (<http://amr2you.blogspot.com/>)

This list and some of the questions/exercise should be credited to the Annenberg Classroom on the following site: <http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/page/the-credibility-challenge>.

After you select one of the sources above, read an article and try to decide whether the site or article within is biased or slanted in any way. After answering the questions below, describe why you think the site/article is trustworthy or not.

1) Type of publication

- a) What type of publication is it? News? Opinion? Advertisement or promotional? Scientific study? Academic? Creative? Other?

2) Source or Author

- a) Who wrote it? Who published it? Who filmed it and where did it first appear?

- b) Is the source or author biased? Meaning: Is the source on a particular side of the argument that is related to the business of the publication or the author?

c) What is copyright? If you were to use any part of this source in your own publication or paper, what would you need to do to satisfy copyright law? How would you cite your source?