

## Evaluating Online Resources

*How to separate the good from the bad . . . from the really bad*

Anyone can write an article, post it online and declare it to be credible, but how do you know whether this is a trusted source of information that can be used for an assignment?

### **First: Is This Even Necessary?**

The IIT libraries have millions of items: we have both books and journal articles available in electronic format, which allows you to access them without having to come to the library. All of our online items are, of course, from reputable sources and are fully-qualified for use by students. Click [here](#) to view databases that are available at IIT.

*When you use online resources from the IIT Galvin Library databases,  
no evaluation is needed – all items are from credible sources!*

### **Authority: Who Wrote It?**

The author's name and contact information should be clearly stated on the site, whether it is a personal, corporate or agency website.

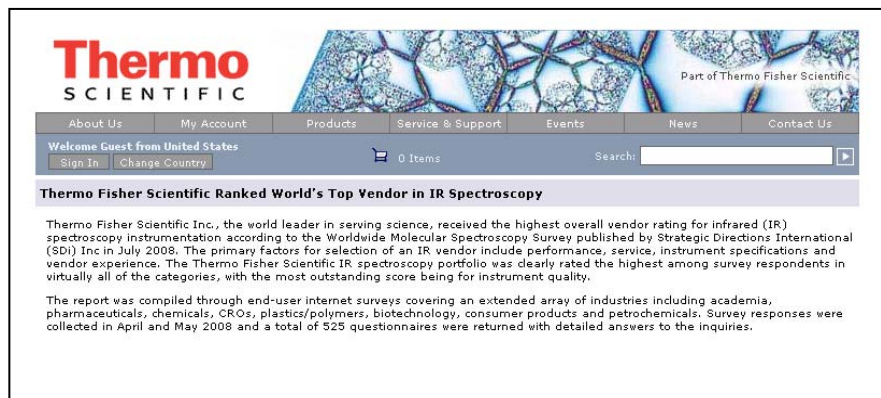
### *Questions to ask:*

? Which domain is the site on? Extensions such as **.gov**, **.edu** and **.aero** are *sponsored domains*, meaning that domain access is restricted to maintain integrity of the resources. This doesn't mean that there isn't valuable information to be found on **.com**, **.org**, **.us** (or other) domains, but it is worth considering when accessing a site that isn't on a sponsored domain.

? Does the author list his or her academic credentials? A list of citations this person has written in scholarly publications is a sign that this may be a credible source of information.

**Good source:** The Environmental Protection Agency ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)) includes the Clean Air Technology Center, which discusses emerging pollution control technologies.

**Bad source:** Thermo Scientific ([www.thermo.com](http://www.thermo.com)) is concerned about air pollution, but they also want to sell you products that monitor and combat pollution emissions. They are not likely to include information on pollution control technologies developed by other companies.



## Integrity / Objectivity: Why Was This Written?

The resource should include all relevant information on the topic and present it in an objective manner. An article written with bias towards a particular viewpoint cannot usually be trusted.

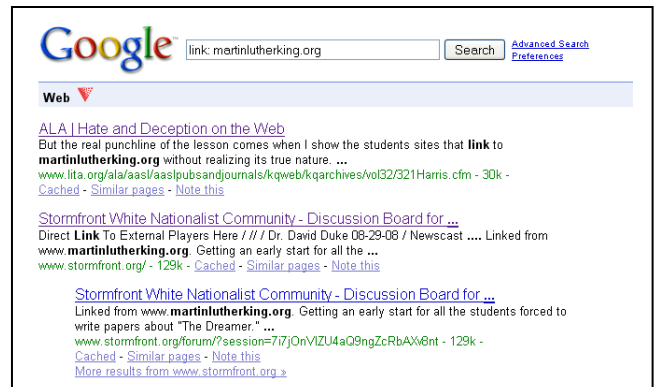
### Questions to ask:

- ? What is the purpose of this site? Is there any information that has been left out? This may be an indication of bias towards only one point of view. Example: an article about the death penalty only mentions the “for” side, and not the “against.”
- ? Is there a conflict of interest? Example: a person recommends a product without mentioning that they own a large portion of that product’s stock and will benefit from its sale.
- ? Is the information accurate? A bibliography that lists citations for reputable publications is a sign that this is a credible source for information.

### Still not sure? Try this exercise:

You can gain a lot of information about a site by finding out what other websites link to it. Many search engines have a method of searching for a list of websites that link to a particular site.

1. Go to the Google home page.
2. Perform the following search:  
**link: martinlutherking.org**
3. Look at the sites that are listed (see image at right).  
As it turns out, **martinlutherking.org** is a malicious website created by a hate group.
4. Perform the same search for **thekingcenter.org** and you will see that this is official cite for resources about Dr. King.



## Currency: Is This Site Up-to-Date?

Some subject areas, such as computer programming or environmental engineering, require up-to-date information. For example, a website on Java programming would be most helpful to a new programming student if it included examples from the most recent version of the language.

### Questions to ask:

- ? How frequently is this site updated? Is there a publication date listed for each article? Sites offering data or statistics should indicate when and how data was collected.
- ? Is the information current enough for your needs? Data sources like statistics may need to be very current to be useful—such as those dealing with an upcoming election.

## Still Having Trouble?

You can always [contact](#) one of the IIT librarians. We are available by phone, e-mail, instant message and of course, you can always visit us in person at the Galvin Library reference desk!

Click [here](#) for a contact list by area of expertise.

