

Determining Authoritativeness

What is meant by authoritative? - Authoritative sources means the source is reliable, can be trusted, and has itself used or relied upon trustworthy resources. An authoritative source is a source which supplies some good evidence that allows you to trust it.

Students need to be critical of the sources they find. This is especially true with websites and information found online. Anyone can put any information they want online – this results in a lot of information being incorrect, unreliable, and misleading. There is no one checking to make sure information online is correct, so you will have to do that yourself.

You can be fairly certain some resources are authoritative, such as case reporters, government documents, peer-reviewed journals, etc. But other resources can be tricky.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when you are trying to determine whether or not a website is authoritative:

- Is there an author listed? Do you know who wrote the information?
- Are any references cited? Can you check where they found their information?
- Does the author have the credentials to comment on the issue at hand?
- Is there a way to contact the author or the owner of the website?
- Does the website indicate when the article/information was written?
- How current is the information? When was it updated?
- Does the author or website provide a biased view on a topic?
- Are there ads on the website (ads may indicate a bias or the true nature or purpose of the website)?
- Is the information factual, not opinion?
- Are there spelling or grammar mistakes? Does the site appear as though it was put together carelessly?
- What is the web site's affiliation? Is it an organization you've heard of? Does it have a good reputation?

What are some good ways to find authoritative website?

- Look at different library and university homepages to see what links they have to outside websites.
- Government websites often link to other websites – take advantage of this.
- Look at the resources from journal articles and books – if they reference websites, those websites are more likely reliable.

If you need help determining whether or not a website is trustworthy, consult your professor or a law librarian.