

Accessing sources: technology literacy—using electronic sources

Using the internet as a resource for finding information is more and more commonplace, and it is a tremendous resource. However, it must be used critically and with care. One important thing to be aware of is that unlike resources found in a library in printed form, those found on the internet may not have been through a review or editing process.

Students should:

- know appropriate search engines to use
- not rely exclusively on sources found on the internet
- have a clear and focused research question to help them search more directly on the internet (given the amount of information available it is easy to be overwhelmed)
- critically evaluate the reliability and validity of the information presented on the internet
- keep a detailed record of all references, in accordance with the IB's minimum requirements, ensuring that the URL of where the source was located is written down correctly. This includes recording the date that the site was accessed. The Researcher's reflection space (RRS) is a good tool for supporting this practice.

The following table contains a series of questions students can apply to determine the reliability and validity of information presented on the internet. It could equally apply to print resources.

Desirable source attribute	Questions to consider in order to determine this
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the author of the information identified? • If the author has chosen to remain anonymous, why might this be? Is this significant in terms of your evaluation of the information presented? • Is there enough information available to establish the author's credibility? • Is the author affiliated to an academic institution or credible organization? • Is the author qualified to write about the subject?
Audience appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the intended audience? • Does the information presented appropriately address the target audience? • Is the information relevant to your area of research?
Reliability and credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the information appear to be valid and well researched? • Can it be supported by evidence? • Can the information be verified through other sources? • Is there a non-web equivalent of this material that could be used to verify the information? • Does the URL (web address) give you any indication of the source of the information?
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an indication as to who has responsibility for the accuracy of the information provided? • Do you know if the information has been reviewed? • Are there grammatical, spelling or typographical errors? If there are, what does this suggest about the source? • Is there a bibliography?
Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information fact or opinion? • Is the language used free of bias? • Is the author's point of view objective or do they make it clear when they are expressing a personal opinion? • Is it a personal website? • Is the author affiliated with any institution or organization which might create a bias in the information?
Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information kept up-to-date?

Desirable source attribute	Questions to consider in order to determine this
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there any indication of when the information was last updated?<li>• Are any links up to date and working?