

Quality in Information Resources: Life Sciences

Books and Journals

Traditional forms of information resource, such as books and journals, always go through a system of **evaluation** before you see them.

Books are **edited** before publication.

Journals are **edited** and also '**peer-reviewed**' – checked by experts in the field. Consequently, especially in scientific research, they are regarded as the highest quality form of information.

In contrast, almost anyone can produce a web page and put it onto the web, so how do you know whether the information is valid?

Evaluating web pages for your academic work

Where does the site originate?

Is it produced by a company, an organisation, a single individual?

A good website should indicate 'ownership' on every page, but, if it doesn't, you may find some hints in the URL.

Companies:

- .com
- .co.uk

Companies **may** want to sell you something and you should take this into account when you read the page.

Educational establishments:

- .edu
- .ac.uk

Government departments (including local government):

- .gov
- .gov.uk

Organisations:

- .org
- .org.uk

Pressure groups or political parties, for instance, may wish to promote a particular point of view. This does not necessarily mean that the information they provide is incorrect, but you should take it into account.

Country of origin:

In many cases, the country of origin is irrelevant to the usefulness of the information. In some situations, however, it may be important, for instance, if you are looking at the law or government regulations relating to a particular topic. Again, if country of origin is not clearly stated on the webpage, you may get a clue from the URL.

- UK - .uk
- France - .fr
- Germany - .de

Sites in the US have no country indicator in the URL.

- .com
- .edu

Not all .com sites are American, however, so beware!

Is there a date of origination/most recent update?

Look at the date, and be careful of undated information – it could be seriously out-of-date. Unfortunately, even highly respectable organisations sometimes leave older pages on the web!

Are there any references to other work?

Particularly in research, scholarship builds on previous work. Look for up-to-date, relevant, appropriate references, including books and journals.

Watch out for paid placements

'Sponsored links' are found in most search engines. Organisations pay to be included at the top of a results list.

Sponsored links have their uses, but in general, for academic work, they can usually be **ignored**.

In Google, sponsored links appear against a coloured background and all good search engines make them easily identifiable.

Is the item a journal article?

Many journals are now available via the web and you will occasionally find journal articles in Google searches. If you need journal articles, however, you will find that databases are a more reliable source.

For further help and information about assessing information quality please contact your [*subject librarian*](#).