Web Source Evaluation

In order to maintain credibility and professionalism when using sources from the Internet or other electronic sources, the following guidelines should be followed to determine the validity of each source.

Authority
1. Verify authorship. This may require some investigation, such as examination of the home page of the site or an "about this site" link. Recognize the difference between the author and the webmaster.
2. Evaluate the credibility of the author. What are his or her qualifications or credentials? Does the author give credit to other sources for borrowed information?
3. Locate the publisher and place of publication of the document. This information can usually be found in the URL domain.
4. Think about the purpose of the document and why it was produced. Is it intended to argue a position, sell a product, or inform readers?
5. Determine the site's intended audience. If the audience profile does not fit, is information on the site still relevant to the paper topic?

Accuracy
1. Check for the date of publication or the latest update to determine if the site is current.
2. Verify the site's links. If the links no longer work, the site may be out of date and no longer credible or relevant.
3. See if factual information is documented, so its accuracy can be verified in other sources, ideally through links to other reputable sites.
4. Consider the quality of writing. Grammatical, mechanical, and typographical errors may introduce inaccuracies and reveal a lack of professionalism and attention to detail.

Objectivity
1. Determine the goals and objectives of the page. Advertisements and opinions should be clearly marked and separated from factual information.
2. Pay attention to the level of detail in the information and to whether the information is the author's opinion or is objective, verifiable information. Examine opinions and arguments to determine if they are fully and logically supported.