Writing Process - 7

Evaluating Internet Sources

The Internet contains more information than any standard library, so it is no surprise that students gravitate towards it as they work to gather information on a topic. Unfortunately, not all of the information on the Internet is reliable, and it is *your* responsibility to confirm the credibility of the sources used for your project.

Why Isn't the Internet Reliable?

Anyone who has a computer — from professors to grade-school children — can publish on the Internet.

The Internet is an anonymous space in which people can claim false credentials. It is also widely used as a space in which people can pursue their hobbies; having a casual interest in something is very different from being an expert.

Because the Internet reaches a wide audience, many people use it as a way to further their own political agendas. These people might post things that are not true — simply to support their cause.

How to Use the Internet for Research:

As a student of SHSU, you have access to a large variety of online databases; check out the "Databases" area on the Newton Gresham Library website. These are collections of major journal, newspaper, and magazine articles, which are generally peer-reviewed (edited by an outside source who is an expert in the field). Try searching for information on your topic in databases like EBSCOhost, LexisNexis, or JSTOR. When you find an article that is relevant to your research, check out the bibliography: this could lead you to other valuable sources. Google Scholar is another highly accessible engine that can be used to find sources.

A Word About Wikipedia:

Since Wikipedia allows volunteers to submit content to their website, you cannot be sure that their information is correct. If you find something on Wikipedia that you like, try to confirm that information in another source. Use Wikipedia only as a launching point; there are links at the bottom of their pages that could help you find a more reliable source.

Tips for Using Internet Sources

🐾 If your professor tells you not to use Internet sources, do not use Internet sources.

🐾 Does the source list a person or organization as the author? If not, be wary of the source's credibility. If so, what does a Google search reveal about that person or organization?

🐾 Look at the website's extension: **.edu** refers to an educational institution. These are frequently — but not always — credible sites. **.gov** refers to a government website. These are often good resources for statistical information. **.org** extensions mostly refer to non-profit organizations. These organizations are often trying to further an agenda, so do your best to gauge the organization's objectivity. **.com** is the extension for most commercial websites. Many .com websites are well put together and accurate, and many are not — it is up to you, the researcher, to determine whether or not the information is accurate.