Evaluating Websites

Before using a website for research, you should check the quality of the information it contains. Below are some things to look for and a quick checklist at the end to practice what you learned.

1) Purpose
   - What is the purpose of the website--why would someone create it?
   - Is the website’s purpose to inform? (to give facts, information)
   - Is the website’s purpose to explain? (to demonstrate, to show “how to”)
   - Is the website’s purpose to persuade? (to convince you to adopt a certain point of view or to sell you something)
   - How does that purpose impact the quality/extent of the information provided?

2) Authority
   - Is it clear who is responsible for creating and updating the site? Check the web address (URL) for whether the site is related to education (.edu), U.S. government (.gov), business (.com), organization (.org) or is a personal website. Also, are the contributors or authors named?
   - Is the site affiliated with a reputable group or organization?
   - Have the contributors provided details about their experience, education, or other qualifications, as a means of justifying their ability / competence to write about a particular topic?

3) Currency
   - When was the information first written (look for a published date, if available)?
   - Has the material ever been updated or revised since then?
   - Are any cited sources listed on the website reasonably current, or are they all mostly out-of-date?
   - If there are links within the website, are they still current and available?

4) Accuracy
   - Is the material presented on the website in a logical way?
   - Is the written material at the site mostly free of grammatical and spelling errors?
   - Are any sources cited at the website relevant to the topic?
   - Is the information complete? Sometimes a website can be missing essential information that other more in-depth sources can provide.

5) Objectivity
   - Do the authors/contributors show bias?
   - If the website is only showing one side of an issue, or only contains personal opinions, think about what other sources you may need to get a complete and factual picture of a topic (journal articles, newspaper articles, encyclopedias, books, etc.)

6) Scope
   - Does the title of the website indicate its overall content?
   - Is it a basic overview website or is it a highly detailed website?
   - Is there enough depth and detail for your needs?
   - Do you need to pay for information at the website or is it all freely available to you?
   - Does the website give you any new information that you can use or is it mostly information you already have from other sources?
7) Design
- Is it easy to move around the website?
- Is the website mostly advertisement-free?

8) Comparison
- Is the website the best / only source for the information?
- Have you tried any other sources of information (such as books or articles found in library databases), to make sure you have a complete picture?
- Websites are generally considered different sources from library databases, although both are accessed via an internet connection.
- It is likely you will need to use articles and books from library databases as sources, in addition to websites, for many of your college assignments. Links to BCTC Library Databases (such as Academic Search Complete and Ebook Central) are available at: https://bluegrass.kctcs.edu/library/
- There are also several print journals and books in the library for your use.

Now, put into practice what you have learned by evaluating a website, below:

Website Evaluation - Checklist

Website I am evaluating: __________________________________________

1) Is the website’s purpose suited to my needs?  Yes ___ No ___ Maybe ___
2) Is the content written by a qualified person or group?  Yes ___ No ___ Maybe ___
3) Is the website current?  Yes___ No ___ Maybe ___
4) Is the website accurate?  Yes___ No ___ Maybe ___
5) Is the website objective?  Yes___ No ___ Maybe ___
6) Is the website detailed enough for your needs?  Yes___ No ___ Maybe ___
7) Is the website design usable and not confusing?  Yes___ No ___ Maybe ___
8) Have I considered using other sources in addition to, or instead of, the website?  Yes ___ No ___ Maybe ___

Decision: Overall, do you think this website is of sufficient quality to consider using as a source for your research?  Yes ___ No ___ Maybe ____

Not sure? When in doubt, look for a better resource to use.

You might also ask your instructor if it is an acceptable source before turning in your work.