

## Developing Good Internet Research Practices (Part One): Authoritative Sources

### How to tell if a source is authoritative:

- Is there an identified author?

Authoritative sources are not written anonymously. Even articles written for a reference compendium, such as Oxford Reference, still include the author with each article.

- Are the author's credentials listed?

Degrees, career positions, and acclaims related to the subject in question are all identifying factors of an authoritative author. If an author with a literature degree wrote a report on genetic engineering, you need to question if the source is an expert in the field. However, if an author with a doctoral degree in biochemistry wrote an article on genetic engineering, the source is more likely to be authoritative.

- Who or what is hosting the site?

A legitimate source will often have an easily identified, legitimate host. In other words, information taken from [www.data.gov](http://www.data.gov) is considered authoritative; information taken from any Web site ending in wordpress.com is not.

- What is the overall purpose of the site?

This question is often directly related to the site host. For example, the sole purpose of [www.data.gov](http://www.data.gov) is to provide a database of information collected by the various departments of the federal government. Most wordpress.com sites are personal blogs whose focus is on personal opinion.

- Is the content professional?

Critically review the content of the article and the information provided by the author or entity. Are there spelling or grammar errors? Is the style carelessly written or does the site show author bias? These are often red flags, so read the information carefully and closely.