Searching for Educational, Research-Based Information on the Internet

The mission of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is improving the lives of people, businesses, and communities across Texas through high-quality, relevant education. Education can be in the form of public presentations, online courses, brochures, and websites. Any resource that is used with clientele, whether it is an adult or youth audience, must be unbiased and research-based. This is especially true regarding the Internet.

The Internet is full of useful information, if used properly. Unfortunately, some of the information posted is not based on research or posted by reputable sources. We must monitor or inspect the content of information websites.

The Internet can be a friend or foe. It gives us instant access to a world of information, but much of the information we find there is biased or wrong. How can we make sure a source of information is trustworthy? First, check the ending to the url:

Suffix	Description
.com	A commercial entity; anyone can use these
.org	A non-commercial entity; these can include clubs, associations, and other organizations
.edu	School, college, or university
.gov	Government entities; use of these suffixes is restricted
.net	Network operators
.mil	Military sites

Questions to ask to verify the legitimacy of websites:
- What organization is behind the site?
- Can you verify that the organization is legitimate?
- Can the references listed be verified in other sources?
- Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?
- Do editors monitor what is published?
- Is the author (or site) credible?
- Is it clear who is responsible for the accuracy of the material?
- Are the charts or graphs with statistical data labeled and easy to read?
- Is the information up to date?

When dealing with the Internet, there are no guarantees. Websites do not come with disclaimers that identify them as reputable. We must ask questions of the websites we are visiting to help determine their quality.

Personal websites are published by individuals and may or may not be linked with organizations. The urls for personal sites may have various endings, including *.com* and *.org.* Use these sites with caution.

Business and marketing websites are geared to promote or sell products. They are often distinguished by url addresses ending in *.com* and *.net.*

Additional questions to ask about websites:
- What company or individual is behind the website?
- Can you verify that the company or individual is legitimate?
- Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?
- If there is any advertising, is it clearly different from the informational content?
- Is the information current?