You can check the validity (is the site presenting supportable facts and truths,) and reliability (is the site consistently accurate over time and across a representative sample of similar sites,) by using the three part model of a bibliographic entry.

All bibliographic entries, regardless of "system," have three parts"

- Author
- Title / Titles
- Publication Facts

An example bibliographic entry is:

Post, Neil. The Joys of Adolescents. New York: Delacorte Press, 1992

The Author is: Neil Post.
The Title is: The Joys of Adolescents
The Publication Facts are: New York, Delacorte Press, 1992.

The Author of a web site can be:

- The creator of the web site
- The contributor of the content of the site, which is maintained by another person
- If there is no author or creator evident, what company or institution is responsible for publishing the content of the site.

The Title or Titles of the web site might include:

- A web site header announcing the purpose or content of the web site.
- A specific title of an article or presentation of information about a subject.

The Publication Facts of a web site might include:

- The date the content was written or placed on the web site.
- The date of the last updating of the web site
- The URL (the address) of the web site
- Any company or institution responsible for publishing the web site

Using this format as a rubric, follow these stages of site analysis to determine the web site may be a good source of research

Stage 1

- Check to see that these three elements are present. If they are, that is the first indication that this might be a good web site resource.
    - If one of the elements are missing, do the remaining elements have sufficient credibility to continue considering the site as a source.
    - If two or more of the elements are missing, it is probably a good idea to omit using the site for any reference in your working bibliography for your research. You can still use hints or ideas from the site, but only as an aid to finding a better site, or better information.

Stage 2

Look at the quality or relevance of the three elements.

Author

- Check to see if there is biographical information about the author or creator of the web site.
- Does the author or creator have expertise in the area he or she is presenting?
- Does the author or creator have a connection to a reputable academic institution, research organization, social institution (church, temple, community organization, etc.,) business, or governmental service related to your topic.
- Does the author or creator have a connection to a reputable business associated with your field of study.
- If there is no author or creator listed, is there a reputable organization that is publishing the content on the site. An example might be The American Cancer Society, if you were researching cancer.

Title or Titles

- Do the titles on the web site seem to have a close connection to your research?
- If the web site is untitled and not connected to the criteria listed under "Author" above, you should omit the site as a reference for your working bibliography.
- If the information on the web site comes from some other source, you should check out that source (another web site, a book, an article) to see if it is a reputable source.

Publication Facts

- Is the URL reliable, that is, can the site be accessed at any time or day?
- Is the URL attached in some way to pop-up window advertisements? If so, omit the web site.
- Is the URL attached in some way that redirects the researcher to some other unrelated or inappropriate site. If so, omit the site.
- Is there information about who operates and publishes the web site? Are they reliable, well known, and credible? An example might be a site on kinds of intelligence on the Yale University web pages.
- Is there a date of last update? If so, when was the last time the site was updated? If it is more than 6 months, make sure the information is not outdated.
- Is there a posting date for the information? When was the data actually placed on the site? If it has been there for 5 years, is it still current? Does it still apply?
- Is there a date related to an article published on the site. Once again, is it over 5 years old? If so, it can still be excellent, but check closely for outdated information.

Stage 3

Content Analysis

- Is the information on the web site in direct contradiction to the overwhelming majority of other sites you have viewed? This doesn't mean it is not a good site, in fact, it may mean it provides a point of view that may differ, but provide better understanding of your topic. Be careful, however, if it doesn't fit what most others are saying, there is more of a chance that the data is not reliable. To make a decision, check on the author's credentials or the reputation of the school or institution attached to the site. If those things are missing, or questionable, omit the site.
- Does the content on the site seem to make sense? If it doesn't, you have to look deeper. If the content just doesn't seem reasonable, omit the web site.
- Does the content on the web site completely agree with what you want to believe? If it does, be careful not to collect too many of these sites. Look for a site that will be different than what you think, challenge what you think, but still be reasonable and reputable. You need to see all sides, or as many points of view about your topic as you can.
- Does the content of the site contain obvious errors of fact, errors of inference, based on your research up to that point? If so, omit the site.
- Does the content of the site contain information presented in a way to influence you to believe a certain way, or to accept a certain "truth?" If it does, seriously question the site, and consider omitting it. It is not presenting information, but trying to prove itself to be "true." That is not scientific.
- Is the content of a site written in such a way that it is impossible to test or research whether it is true or not, it is not a good site. You might pick up some ideas from it, but omit it from your working bibliography.
- Is the content of the site written in such as way as to present its data as "the only right way," or "the only true way," omit it.