



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Evaluating Websites

In any conversation about technology in adult faith formation, one of the questions that will immediately surface is the necessity of determining the authenticity and trustworthiness of information on the internet.

There is an often-held belief that if it's on the internet, it must be true. Hence, helping people be discerning is a crucial area for adult faith formation, helping people to be media literate in today's world.

It is a question

- as adult faith formation leaders search for resources
- to help us guide all our parishioners in their everyday searches and influx of information
- for those who work with teens and young adults as they encounter the various resources that are available

Fortunately, there are many organizations, particularly schools and universities, that have shared guidelines and suggestions for evaluating websites.

Some Questions to Ask

Let's look, first, at some key factors to consider when evaluating websites. Listed here are **three sets of questions to ask**; some might be repetitive, but they provide various reminders for evaluating websites. Pick and choose which one is most helpful for you. (Different people on staff or your adult faith formation committee might each use a different approach ... guaranteeing that all factors have been looked at.)

1. Authority and credibility:
 - Who created the site? Are they experts in the field?
 - Is it from a reputable organization or institution?
 - Are sources cited for factual claims?
2. Accuracy and reliability:
 - Is the information factual and verifiable?
 - Are there spelling/grammatical errors or obvious mistakes?
 - Is the content up-to-date?

3. Objectivity:
 - Is there a clear bias or agenda?
 - Are multiple viewpoints presented fairly?
4. Coverage and depth:
 - How comprehensive is the information?
 - Is it surface-level or in-depth?
5. Currency:
 - When was the content last updated?
 - Is timeliness important for your topic?
6. Design and functionality:
 - Is the site easy to navigate and use?
 - Does it load quickly and work on mobile devices?
7. Purpose and intended audience:
 - What's the main goal of the website?
 - Who is the target audience?
8. Security:
 - Does it use HTTPS for secure connections?
 - Are there privacy policies in place?



1. Check the source:
 - Look at the website's "About" page to verify its credentials and mission
 - Check if it's a reputable news organization or known entity
 - Be wary of unfamiliar sites or those with obvious biases

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2. Look for author information:
 - Check if articles have author bylines
 - Research the author's background and expertise
3. Check the date:
 - Verify when the article or page was published or last updated
 - Older information may be outdated, especially for fast-changing topics
4. Look for citations and sources:
 - Credible sites will often link to or cite their sources
 - Follow those links to verify the original information
5. Cross-reference with other sources:
 - Check if other reputable sites are reporting the same information
 - Be cautious if only one site is making a particular claim
6. Use fact-checking websites:
 - Sites like Snopes, FactCheck.org, or PolitiFact can help verify claims
 - These sites specialize in debunking misinformation
7. Check for unusual URLs or site designs:
 - Be wary of sites with strange domain names or unprofessional layouts
 - These could be signs of fake news sites
8. Be aware of your own biases:
 - Consider if you're more likely to believe something because it aligns with your views
 - Try to approach information objectively
9. Use reverse image searches:
 - For images, use Google's reverse image search to see if they've been manipulated or taken out of context
10. Consider using browser extensions:
 - Tools like NewsGuard can provide credibility ratings for websites

1. Check the URL: Legitimate sites often use .edu, .gov, or established .com domains. Be wary of unusual domain extensions.
2. Look for author information: Credible sites usually provide author bios or "About Us" pages with clear information on who runs the site.
3. Check for recent updates: Regularly updated content suggests an active, maintained site.
4. Evaluate the writing quality: Well-written, error-free content is a good sign. Poor grammar or spelling may indicate lack of professionalism.
5. Look for citations and references: Credible sites back up claims with links to reputable sources.
6. Check for bias: Consider the site's purpose and potential biases in how information is presented.
7. Cross-reference information: Verify key facts across multiple reputable sources.
8. Use fact-checking websites: Sites like Snopes or FactCheck.org can help verify controversial claims.
9. Check site security: Look for "https" in the URL, indicating a secure connection.
10. Assess the overall design: Professional-looking sites are generally more trustworthy,

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Some resources

In addition to the above three sets of questions, many organizations – especially libraries, universities and schools provide additional direction:

- <http://libguides.bc.edu/content.php?pid=1049&sid=3873>
- <http://guides.lib.purdue.edu/c.php?g=352855&p=2378010>
- <https://ccri.edu/library/help/evalsites.html>
- http://guides.library.cornell.edu/evaluating_Web_pages
- <http://www.kathleenamorris.com/2018/11/20/evaluate-websites/>
- <https://research.moreheadstate.edu/evaluatingwebsites>
- <https://www.library.kent.edu/criteria-evaluating-web-resources>
- https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/library/CoreSkills/6_Criteria_for_Websites.pdf
- https://sites.umgc.edu/library/libhow/websiteevaluation_tutorial.cfm
- <https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2020/5/11/how-to-read-the-internet?fbclid=IwAR3We9hFYCkyjL-4QCN9MpMy67jW7Tb44CI7LRXd2FF0ENeS09ng0Ih6CSY>

The challenge

Excellent as all these resources are, they do not specifically evaluate the catholicity of the site. In our next issue, we'll look at some helps for evaluating Catholic websites.



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis: Transforming the Vision and Practice of Parish Catechesis:*
<https://twentythirdpublications.com/products/guided-by-the-directory-for-catechesis>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <http://adultfaith.weebly.com/>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf