Evaluating Internet Sources

You'll have plenty of opportunities to do online research, and you are encouraged to find videos, images, and articles about any of the topics you find interesting. The best way to learn is to follow your interests in any given subject. BE AWARE, however, that many online resources have no basis in fact (or, often, in reality) and even commonly used resources like Wikipedia are full of errors and half- truths. When doing research online, be sure to examine who is writing what you are reading. Consider their intent and inherent bias. Materials produced by colleges and universities and written by well- known scholars are your best bet for finding meaningful, relevant information to help you with your course.

When you do online research, avoid drawing conclusions before you've checked the information for reliability. Often, you can tell when a website contains bias or is opinion-based. Some sites look very convincing, but contain information that is not supported by scientific evidence or experimentation. When you are uncertain of a source's reliability, consider the following criteria before you decide to use the information in your research:

- The authors make their case based on adequate evidence.
- The authors interpret the data cautiously.
- The authors acknowledge and deal with opposing views or arguments.
- The authors give a list of current sources that support their claims.

Some characteristics of unreliable web sites require practice to identify. One trick is to look at the sources that are linked in the article you want to verify. These links can give you some idea of reliability. If your source is linked to a number of questionable sites, it's probably not a good source. Characteristics of unreliable websites:

- The authors make extraordinary claims with little supporting evidence.
- The authors relate evidence based on personal experience instead of referring to controlled studies.
- The author appeals to emotion rather than logic.
- The authors misrepresent or ignore opposing views.
- The arguments are biased to support a political or economic agenda.
- The site is linked to sites that support a particular political or economic agenda.

You will find a resource page for many grades and high school courses on the Oak Meadow website (oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links). This page will include a variety of print and online sources that you might find useful as you are discovering new information, or going more in depth on familiar topics.

These links are meant to help you in your research, not take the place of it—consider them a starting point. Find additional sources, evaulate their authenticity, and remember to CITE YOUR SOURCES!