

Reliability of information in the Web

With other media, the reliability varies from medium to medium. For example:

- I. Newspapers, journals, TV, etc. are not reliable sources of information. However, they can be used as indicators of public opinion, etc.
- II. Academic journals are reliable since articles are subject to a refereed process.
- III. Reliability of books varies. Popular books are as little reliable as newspapers. More “serious” (academic) books are as reliable as academic journals. Reliable books tell you where and how you can check all the information they provide.
- IV. Publications of governmental organizations (i.e., Statistics Canada), international organizations (i.e., World Bank), etc. containing data are usually primary sources of information.

There is a huge variance in the reliability of different web pages. The variance is as big as that of the other media combined. Some sites are comparable to newspapers and, in the same way that you should not use newspapers to provide facts, you should not use these pages. Others are primary sources of information. Before using a page as a reference, you should ask yourself, at the very minimum, who is the author of the page and when was the site last updated.

Wikipedia is not acceptable as a source not because it is not reliable (the proportion of errors is statistically larger than in the best encyclopedias but not by much and the fact that there are more errors is not very surprising given the much larger amount of information in Wikipedia) but because an encyclopedia is only acceptable as a source at primary school level, maybe at high school level, but most certainly not at university level.