

Reading A Web Address!

Reading a URL is the first step in learning the language of the Internet. Learning to identify the specific language of a URL is an exercise in critical thinking!

Goal:

To make judgments about information on a web site based on what the specific URL is telling you. Look at the three guiding questions that help with this task:

1. Do you recognize the domain name?

The domain name can be found after the **http://** and **www.** As far as the first **slash /**
Example: www.novemberlearning.com, *novemberlearning.com* is the domain name.

A domain name can give you clues about the quality of information on a site or at least tell you what a site is about.

2. What is the extension in the domain name?

.com and .net are examples of **extensions**. Extensions are very important in domain names. You may know many extensions already. Extensions show the type of establishment that publishes or owns the domain. Check out this list of extensions:

.edu	Educational organizations (most US universities)
.k12	US school site (not all schools use this)
.ac	Academic institution (outside the US)
.sch	School site (some school sites outside the US use this)
.com	Company (usually .co in the United Kingdom)
.org	Any organization
.gov	Government agency
.net	Network
.mil	Military Institution
.biz, .name, .pro, .info. All these are used for commercial purposes.	

Country codes may also make up extensions such as .uk, .ca, .za, and so forth. You can find all of these codes at:

<http://www.computeruser.com/resources/dictionary/noframes/nf.domains.html>

Extensions such as .com, .net and .org can be purchased by anyone. This means it is not the most reliable information if you are researching a topic and want to access academic-type of information. There may be good information on an .org or .com site but it is not directly affiliated with an academic institution.

3. Are you on a personal page?

If you look beyond the first slash mark in a URL/ for clues to determine more about a personal page. Information posted on a personal site may or may not be trustworthy.

Basically an individual creates a personal page. These websites may contain useful information but they may also contain highly biased information.

When you see a name in the URL such as **jd**oe and a tilde ~ or % or the word **users**, **people**, or **members** often this means you are on a personal website.

Even if you are on an .edu site you still need to be aware of personal pages. A good example for your students is the Holocaust Revisionist site that argues that the Holocaust never happened. Although the domain name is northwestern.edu and you should be able to trust it, the tilde~ followed by someone's name, tells us that this is a personal posting and not an official Northwestern University page.

An instructor named Arthur Butz posted this revisionist site and now the site is down. However, if you know how to use a special tool called the Wayback Machine, it will trace back the origins so you can see the history of a site. If the school has blocked this site, teachers should try this at home to see how effective it is and students should be aware of this service.

Butz's old site had the address of:

<http://pubweb.northwestern.edu/~abutz/di/intro.html>

If you go to the Wayback Machine at

<http://webarchive.org>

paste the address of Butz's former page in the "take me back" box, it will reveal for you the history of that website.

Another good example is www.martinlutherking.org

You might think this is a worthy site on Martin Luther King and it does come up readily in Google, but in fact it is a White Pride organization called Storm Front. It is in fact a hate site.

Here are some websites for you to check out with your students!

All about explorers: <http://allaboutexplorers.com>

If you teach anything about exploration, this site is a must. It's smart, slick and cleverly done, plus has a host of great activities.

California's Velcro Crop under Challenge

<http://home.inreach.com/kumbach/velcro.html>

Did you know about the Velcro shortage in California? Use this fun site to help students separate fact from fiction on the web.

<http://www.dhmo.org/>

Who knew water could be so hazardous. A good site to use with middle school students. Have them click through the forward links on the site. Does the web site reference any other authors?

Dog Island Free Forever <http://www.thedogisland.com>

A puppy dog paradise. Great site for all ages

Feline reactions to bearded men <http://improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html>

A fun site to use when teaching kids how to validate web resources. Science teachers take note! This site pokes fun at the scientific method.

Martin Luther King <http://www.martinlutherking.org>

This seemingly innocent web site address calls for the abolition of Martin Luther King Day and promotes White Pride. Content is inappropriate for all ages.

Stormfront: <http://www.stormfront.org>

The publishers of this site also host the Martin Luther King site. It may be blocked by an Internet filter.

The Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus <http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus.html>

Does the Octopus really exist? A great site to use with all ages. Have students click through the links and read web addresses carefully.

Victorian Robots <http://www.bigredhair.com/robots/index.html>

A great site to use with all ages. It has even stumped historians. Have students truncate the web address so they are just left with the domain name,

<http://www.bigredhair.com>. This will give them some insight into the validity of this site