

Evaluating Holocaust-Related Websites

Adapted from materials prepared by David Klevan, USHMM

Identify the source and assess its credibility.

Recognize the domain name of the site.

- .gov is U.S. government
- .mil is U.S. military
- .edu is an accredited post-secondary educational institution
- .com is a commercial, for-profit entity
- .org is a non-commercial, non-profit entity
- .net is a computer network, particularly and Internet-related network
- .int is an international organization
- .il, .de, .at, .ca, etc. are country identifiers; frequently preceded by .co
(.il is Israel for instance)

Be aware that many colleges and universities restrict server space to professors and students but that some do not. Some allow alumni and others to use their server. Also be aware of the fact that there is often a difference between the quality of student-based and professor-based products.

While “.gov” domain type denotes the information contained in the site is a product of a U.S. government office remember that some sources may have their own agenda. Usually, however, they are of high quality and less likely to be suspect.

Ask these questions about who produced the site.

- Is it clear who is sponsoring the page? Is there a link to another page describing the purpose of the sponsor?
- Is there a way of verifying the “legitimacy” of the sponsor (phone number, address, etc.)? *An email address is not enough.*
- Is it clear who wrote the page?
- Is the author a professional or an amateur (educational degrees etc.)?
- If the author is a professional, does he/she have a connection to the Holocaust? Does this connection qualify one as an authority on the Holocaust?
- Is it possible the author is qualified in some aspects of the Holocaust and not in others?
- REMEMBER – Anyone can publish on-line. ANYONE.

Conduct a preliminary overview of the site.

- Does the page display poorly?
- Are there spelling errors or grammatical errors? Is the page poorly written?
- Does the author use excessive profanity?
- Is the material current? Are there dates indicating when the material was written or posted?

Since the Web is “world wide” some sites may have been written by authors unfamiliar with the English language so some spelling and grammatical errors may exist.

Review the site for accuracy – factual errors and sources of data.

- Does the author define “Holocaust”?
- Are there glaring incorrect statements, citations, etc.?
- Does the text include footnotes, photo captions, etc. that can be used to verify information?
- If material is translated, is a source of the translation cited?
- Does the site include links to other sites? If so evaluate that data independently. Check the URL to see if you are still in the same site.

Check for bias and comprehensiveness of data.

- Is the site or author affiliated with a political party, interest group, professional or governmental agency?
- Does the site have a stated mission?
- What is the purpose of the site (entertainment, marketing, etc.)?
- Does the author use persuasive language? Does he/she use precise language or does he/she generalize, exaggerate, or use extreme language?
- Do the background images or graphics display bias? Are graphs and charts clearly and properly labeled?
- How comprehensive is the historical presentation? Does the author emphasize a particular event, experience, or theme?
- How thorough is the documentation? Are primary sources utilized?

What is an Authoritative Source with Accurate Information?

Generally speaking, the following characteristics are indicators of higher overall reliability and validity.

- National Museums and Memorials
- Government Institutions
- Primary Source Documentation, particularly postwar court exhibits with certified translations
- Materials excerpted from or written by prominent historians in the field: Yehuda Bauer, Israel Gutman, Raul Hilberg, Christopher Browning (among others)

