There are like billions and billions of websites, but not all sites are created equal.

Try searching for "How to cure a cold". You might find a web forum from 2004 where someone suggests putting toothpaste up your nose and singing 'happy birthday', or a site named "cure a cold in 10 minutes" where you only need to buy this one magic pill for $99 to never have a cold again. Finding real medical advice among all the countless bad advice can be close to impossible.

But! All hope is not lost! Here are a few things you should check to help you decide if a website is legit:

Look for Names: Does the site list its author?

➔ If the author of a website or Internet article is willing to list his or her name (and sometimes contact information too) alongside it, that can be a good sign that the information is accurate since it is something the author is willing to stand behind.

Check the Date: When was the site or post written?

➔ When you're using web research (or any research!) to build a case for your argument, you want to use the most recent information possible. Old websites might contain things that have since been proven wrong or are in other ways out-of-date. If you can find the date that a website or article was created, it can help you decide whether it contains useful information or not.

Find the Sources: Where did their information come from?

➔ Just like you're going to backup your research by showing your sources, websites may be more legitimate if they list (or "cite," if you want to use the professional research term) the sources of their information. For example, most Wikipedia articles will have a list of references (like articles, websites or scientific studies) at the bottom of the page to backup the information in the Wikipedia article.

.Com vs .Edu: What's the Domain?

➔ Those three letters at the end of most URLs are called a "domain." The most common domains are ".com" which stands for "commercial," and .net, which stands for "network." These domains can be purchased by any company or person who is willing to pay for them, which might make them more open to bad or misleading information. However, URLs that end in .edu and .gov can only be used by educational or government organizations. For this reason, they may be more trustworthy. Library online databases are a great way to find reliable sources; public libraries often have a .gov or a .org domain.

Sometimes Looks Matter: Is the site well designed?

➔ Whether or not a site looks nice can be a matter of opinion, but sometimes it really can make a difference! If someone spent a lot of time making sure a site looks nice and that the information on it is easy to find, that can be a sign that it is more reliable than a poorly-designed site.

Spell-check: How's the writing style?

➔ Just like when a site is not designed well, bad spelling and grammar can be a sign that the site's creator did not spend a lot of time and care making it. Most creators of legitimate sites spend a lot of time making sure there are as few mistakes on it as possible.

Avoid the Sale: Do they want you to buy something?

➔ Even when a website looks nice, cites sources, and lists authors, you should be suspicious if it seems like it is trying to sell you something. Sometimes creators of websites will mislead you or hide certain information if they want you to buy their product. So when doing web research, be careful of sites that tell you to buy products or pay a fee.

Double-check: Can you verify the info with another source?

➔ Even with all these tips, it can sometimes be difficult to tell if a site is legitimate or not. Some credible sites won't have any of the good qualities above and some bad sites will have all of them. One way to know for sure that the information you're seeing is correct is to double-check it in a source that you are SURE is reliable (like an encyclopedia).

Different Sources for Different Searches: How critical do you need to be?

➔ These guidelines work well for many types of research, but there are plenty of credible websites that may not pass all of the checks above. If you are researching a celebrity and discover that they have a personal blog that they haven't updated in years, and made a lot of spelling errors - it would still be a credible resource, since you know who wrote it. Use your best judgement to evaluate each site you research based on what you are looking for.