

## Use the Web with care

## Rule 17

Enter a few keywords and the Web will give you truckloads of information on almost any question or issue. All manner of views and topics are available, almost instantly, that would take forever to turn up if we had to search painstakingly and by hand in libraries or by correspondence.

Reliability, though, is quite another matter. Libraries have at least some checks on the reliability of the books and other materials they collect. Reputable publishers consult the community of experts before presenting any views as expert. Some publishers are even renowned for employing offices of fact-checkers of their own. But on the Web anyone can say anything whatsoever, and with a little skill or money even the flimsiest opinion site can be dressed up to look sober-minded and professional. There are very few checks on the content of Web sites—often no checks at all.

Only rely on Web sources, then, if you are dealing with an identifiable and independently reputable source. Don't rely on a Web site at all unless you have some idea of its source. Key questions are: Who created this site? Why did they create it? What are their qualifications? What does it mean if they don't tell you? How can you double-check and cross-check its claims?

Be aware also that Web search engines do not search "everything"—far from it. They search only what is indexed, which is only 10 to 20 percent of the available Web, and heavily weighted toward merchandising and "hot" sites. Especially on controversial issues where evidence and conclusions are in dispute, the sites that come up first (and are often *designed* to come up first) are likely to be opinionated bluster from non-experts with agendas. In fact, the best information is often in databases or other academic resources that standard search engines cannot enter at all. Normally you have to search *within* these databases to find the most reliable articles or information on any given topic.

When you really need to know something, then, dig deeper than the standard Web search. What you'll get usually will require harder and more careful reading and thinking—which is what you want, of course—and sometimes a password (hopefully available to you as a student or library patron) in turn. If you are preparing a research project for a class, your teacher should be able to guide you to appropriate Web resources. If not, ask your librarian!

**Critical thinking activity: Recognizing reliable Web sources**

For an out-of-class activity that helps you apply Rule 17, see the "Recognizing reliable Web sources" assignment sheet (p. 454) in Part 3.

# A WORKBOOK FOR ARGUMENTS

A Complete Course in Critical Thinking

*Second Edition*

David R. Morrow  
&  
Anthony Weston

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.  
Indianapolis/Cambridge

Copyright © 2016 by Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 15      1 2 3 4 5 6 7

For further information, please address  
Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.  
P.O. Box 44937  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46244-0937

[www.hackettpublishing.com](http://www.hackettpublishing.com)

Cover design by Deborah Wilkes  
Interior design by Elizabeth L. Wilson

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Morrow, David R.

A workbook for arguments : a complete course in critical thinking / David R. Morrow & Anthony Weston. — Second edition.

pages cm

Also contains the entire text of the fourth edition of Weston's Rulebook, while supplementing this core text with extensive further explanations and exercises. Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-62466-427-4 (pbk.) — ISBN 978-1-62466-428-1 (cloth)

1. Critical thinking. 2. Reasoning. 3. Logic. 4. Persuasion (Rhetoric)  
5. English language—Rhetoric. I. Weston, Anthony, 1954– II. Weston, Anthony, 1954– Rulebook for arguments. III. Title.

BF441.M687 2015

168—dc23

2015019230

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.



# Recognizing reliable Web sources

---

**Objective:** To help you distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources on the Web.

**Instructions:** Read Rule 17 before beginning this activity. Then, complete each of the following steps in order.

1. *Find the Web page for this activity on the companion Web site for this book.* Go to the companion Web site for this book. Click on the link for “Part 3.” Then, click on the link for “Recognizing Reliable Web Sources.”
2. *Examine each of the Web sites linked from the Web page for this activity.* The Web page from Step 1 will contain links to various Web sites. Some of these sites are legitimate sites on which well-informed, relatively impartial experts present information. Others are not (in one interesting way or another). Examine each of the sites carefully, trying to distinguish the sites that make reliable sources from those that do not. For those that do not, try to tell, if you can, what the intention of the site actually is and who its creators might be.
3. *Make a list of sites that would be reliable sources of information and a list of sites that would not be reliable sources of information.* Next to each entry on your list, make a few notes about how you came to the conclusion about the site’s reliability as a source.
4. *In a small group, compare lists to devise a list of reliable sources, a list of unreliable sources, and a list of sources about which you are unsure.* If everyone agrees that a particular site is reliable, put it on your group’s list of reliable sources. If everyone agrees that a site is unreliable, put it on your group’s list of unreliable sources. If your group disagrees on a site, see if you can resolve that disagreement

through discussion or further research. If you can't, put it on your group's list of sources about which you are unsure.

5. *As a class, compile a single list of reliable sources and a single list of unreliable sources.* As a class, compare the lists that each group produced. Try to resolve any disagreements and uncertainties through discussion so that everyone agrees on which sites belong on which list.

**Final product:** The final product of this activity should be three sets of lists: your own lists of reliable and unreliable sites; your group's lists of sites that are reliable, sites that are unreliable, and sites about which your group is unsure; and your class's lists of reliable and unreliable sites.