Questions to Ask When Determining Reliability of Websites

For many academic research projects, instructors will require that you use many different types of resources. Often it is difficult to recognize the value of a particular resource. Since anyone can post content on the internet, it’s very important to understand that not everything you find online is from a credible source. Here are some questions to ask yourself before deciding if what you are looking at is coming from a reputable source:

Who
Is there an author name?
Are any credentials or background information available on the author?
Is there a way to contact the author, whether it’s an individual or an organization?

What
Is the content aimed at a specific audience or the general public?
Are there unbelievable or emotional claims?
Does the site have a lot of advertising? Are the advertisements labeled?
If there is no advertising, who is funding the site?

Why
Is the purpose of the site to inform, persuade, to sell or to entertain?
No one creates a website without a reason; make sure it fits your needs.

When
Is there a date of publication or most recent update?
How current is it?

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Information in the address (URL) will help you determine who is behind the site

.edu are education related websites
.org are nonprofit organizations
.net are networking and business organizations
.gov are governmental
.mil are U.S. military organizations
.com are commercial sites

Why does it matter where I find it, as long as I get the information?

Credible sources make your argument stronger.
Wikipedia can be a good place to start, but you should not be using it as a reference on your research papers; use the resources available to you through the library.
If you have questions, email AskALibrarian@national.edu