

## **Domain suffix**

The term "dot.com" has become a ubiquitous phrase in the English language. The "dot.com" really refers to the domain of a Web site. Sites on the Web are grouped by their URLs according to the type of organization providing the information on the site. For example, any commercial enterprise or corporation that has a Web site will have a domain suffix of .com, which means it is a commercial entity.

The domain suffix provides you with a clue about the purpose or audience of a Web site. The domain suffix might also give you a clue about the geographic origin of a Web site. Many sites from the United Kingdom will have a domain suffix of .uk.

Here follows a list of the most common domain suffixes and the types of organizations that would use them.

### **.com**

Commercial site. The information provided by commercial interests is generally going to shed a positive light on the product it promotes. While this information might not necessarily be false, you might be getting only part of the picture. Remember, there's a monetary incentive behind every commercial site in providing you with information, whether it is for good public relations or to sell you a product outright.

### **.edu**

Educational institution. Sites using this domain name are schools ranging from kindergarten to higher education. If you take a look at your school's URL you'll notice that it ends with the domain .edu. Information from sites within this domain must be examined very carefully. If it is from a department or research center at a educational institution, it can generally be taken as credible. However, students' personal Web sites are not usually monitored by the school even though they are on the school's server and use the .edu domain.

### **.gov**

Government. If you come across a site with this domain, then you're viewing a federal government site. All branches of the United States federal government use this domain. Information such as Census statistics, Congressional hearings, and Supreme Court rulings would be included in sites with this domain. The information is considered to be from a credible source.

### **.org**

Traditionally a non-profit organization. Organizations such as the American Red Cross or PBS (Public Broadcasting System) use this domain suffix. Generally, the information in these types of sites is credible and unbiased, but there are examples of organizations that strongly advocate specific points of view over others, such as the National Right to Life Committee and Planned Parenthood. You probably want to give this domain a closer scrutiny

these days. Some commercial interests might be the ultimate sponsors of a site with this suffix.

### **.mil**

Military. This domain suffix is used by the various branches of the Armed Forces of the United States.

### **.net**

Network. You might find any kind of site under this domain suffix. It acts as a catch-all for sites that don't fit into any of the preceding domain suffixes. Information from these sites should be given careful scrutiny.

### **Authority**

Does the site you're evaluating give credit to an author? If no responsible author is listed, is there an indication of any sponsorship? When trying to determine reliability of information given in any medium, you want to have some idea of what the author's credentials are. Are they experts on the topic they are writing about? What is their educational background? Remember, anyone can publish on the Web. They don't have to know what they're talking about.

You also want to check and see if there's a list of sources given for the information on a site, like a bibliography that you would have to provide for a paper you're writing.

### **Currency**

Information that is outdated may be incorrect or incomplete. A well maintained Web site will generally tell you at the bottom of the initial screen when it was last updated and maybe even when it was originally created and made available on the Web.

### **Links**

An informational Web site in which all the hyperlinks are broken might not be a very reliable resource. Broken hyperlinks are not uncommon, due to the ever changing nature of the Web, but when there are many broken links on a Web site, it might be an indication that the site isn't maintained on a regular basis.

### **URL**

The site address can give you clues as to ultimate sponsorship of a site. If you can't determine who wrote the site or who or what is sponsoring the site, try truncating the URL to its root address. This will tell you where the site is being hosted. For example, this site provides information on nutritional RDAs:

<http://www.mikeschoice.com/reports/rda.htm>.

If you truncate the URL to its root address <http://www.mikeschoice.com>, you will discover that this is a site selling a mineral supplement. Given the obvious bias, this is probably not the best source of nutritional information.

Another clue to what type of site you're looking at is whether there is a ~ (tilde) symbol in the URL. This symbol usually indicates that the site is a personal Web page and the information should be given careful scrutiny.

### **Comparison**

Always compare the information that you find on a Web site with other information sources. Generally, you wouldn't want to use only Web sites as support for a research paper, so you would be looking at other types of sources such as books, magazine articles, etc. as well. How does the information found in the various formats compare?