

may appear prominently on a web page, web sites may promote the products of their advertisers as if they were objectively recommending them without making the financial relationship clear, or the commercial bias may be even more subtle.

3. **Check out the author.** You can find out who runs a site by going to [www.internic.net](http://www.internic.net) and using the “whois” search function. This will give you names and contact information but is not, warns Tina Kelly of the *New York Times*, conclusive. Similarly, she suggests running authors’ names through a search engine to see what you can find out about them. Some browsers will tell you when a site was last updated. And remember that you can always email authors of a site and ask for their credentials.<sup>3</sup>
4. **Note the other kinds of information the site directs you to.** If you are in doubt about a site’s legitimacy, check some of its links to external sites, as well as any footnotes or citations. Are they up to date and well maintained? Do the sources to which they lead help you identify the ideological, commercial, or other biases the site may contain?
5. **Watch out for Internet vandalism.** The open market of the Internet leaves it vulnerable to attacks from vandals who—for reasons ranging from satire to partisanship to outright maliciousness—create deliberately misleading content, or edit existing content in a misleading

way. Wikipedia editors have had to scramble to keep up with partisans and pranksters who have vandalized entries. Look for very recent posts, or footnotes that don’t link to real articles or research, to weed out imposters.

6. **If something about a site does not look right, investigate more closely.** One author calls this the J.D.L.R. (Just Doesn’t Look Right) test.<sup>4</sup> Be suspicious if, for example, you notice lots of misspellings or grammatical errors, or if the site has an odd design. Analyze the site’s tone and approach. When a familiar site doesn’t look the way you expect it to, consider the possibility that it’s been hacked. Ultimately, remember this: anyone can put up a web site—even you. Are you a reliable enough source to be quoted in a college student’s research paper?

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Weisman, “After an Online Firestorm, Congress Shelves Antipiracy Bills,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2012, [www.nytimes.com/2012/01/21/technology/senate-postpones-piracy-vote.html?\\_r=1&ref=global](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/21/technology/senate-postpones-piracy-vote.html?_r=1&ref=global); and Declan McCulagh, “Supreme Court Deals Death Blow to Antiporn Law,” *CNet News*, January 21, 2009, [news.cnet.com/8301-13578\\_3-10147171-38.html](http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-10147171-38.html).

<sup>2</sup> Farhad Manjoo, “HuffPo’s Achilles’ Heel: Search Engine Optimization Won’t Work Forever,” *Slate*, February 8, 2011, [www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2011/02/huffpos\\_achilles\\_heel.2.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2011/02/huffpos_achilles_heel.2.html).

<sup>3</sup> Tina Kelly, “Whales in the Minnesota River? Only on the Web, Where Skepticism Is a Required Navigational Aid,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1999, D1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*