The 5 W's to Determine Good Information:

Although this is simplified, asking the following 5 questions will help you determine whether the information you are using is good information or bad information. If someone is providing good information you should be able to answer all 5 questions. If you can't answer one of the questions, (or the answer you get isn't satisfactory), it might not be good information to use.

1. WHO – Who wrote or published the information? Is it someone you have heard of? Is it an organization that you are familiar with?

2. WHAT – What are the author's credentials? Are they clear about their experience in the subject and how they relates to the topic they are writing on?

3. WHEN – When was the information published? Is it the type of information that changes over time (*Think: Medical Information)*? Or is it the type of information that stays the same (*Think: History)*?

4. WHERE – Where did the author get their information? Are they properly citing their sources? Are they clear on where their facts, statistics, graphs, etc. are coming from?

5. WHY – Why are they publishing this information? What is the author's motivation? Are they showing a bias?

Web Research & Domains
Another thing to think about when doing web research specifically, consider the domain of the web address. The domain is the end of the web address, such as: .gov, .edu, .com, etc.

GOVERNMENT (.GOV) - The most reliable information often comes from government domains (.gov). When doing international relations research, these websites may be particularly useful to you.

EDUCATION (.EDU) - Another good domain to consider is the education domain (.edu). When looking at these websites, consider who the author is. Are you looking at published work by a professor, or an undergraduate project? Professors have more experience in the field, and have studied and researched topics far more than an undergraduate would. Use your 5 W's.

ORGANIZATIONS (.ORG) - You may also encounter organizational domains (.org). These can provide some great information; however, organizations can also show a bias towards their cause. Again, use your 5 W's when evaluating these websites.

COMMERCIAL (.COM) – Commercial websites are probably the most common. There are many that may be useful to you, such as newspapers and magazines. But keep in mind that these are all commercial ventures. So use your 5 W's to focus on who is writing/publishing the information and what is their bias? There are also a lot of other commercial sites that just want to sell you something. Be critical in your examination of these websites.

OTHERS (.NET, .BIZ, etc.) – Although these are less common you still may run across these. Again, these are often commercial ventures trying to sell you something. Be critical in your use of these.