



Is it Reliable? 6 Clues to Good Legal Information Online

If you want more information on a topic, you're probably going to search online. But how do you know if the information you're reading is any good?

1. Where does this information apply?

Laws are different in different places. We use the term "jurisdiction" to describe the place where a law applies. Laws that apply in Canada are different from laws in other countries. There are also different laws within each province in Canada. Federal laws apply across the entire country while provincial laws only apply within that province. Municipalities can also make or enforce laws (usually called bylaws) specific to their region. Laws on First Nations land can be different than laws on other land.

TIP: Check to see where the information is from. It is of no use to you if it doesn't apply where you are.

2. Is the information up-to-date?

Laws change often. The government can change legislation and judges can interpret existing laws in specific ways as they decide cases. Information without a date or that was prepared a long time ago is not as reliable. A date allows you to determine if the information is current enough for your topic.

TIP: Check for a date on the information to see when it was prepared or last updated.

3. Is the information from a trustworthy source?

A reliable source is more likely to provide reliable information. Government departments, courts, universities, libraries and reputable non-profit organizations are likely to be trustworthy sources. If the main purpose of the website is to promote services or sell you something, the information may not be complete or it may be biased. And if the website has lots of distracting advertising, you might have trouble finding the relevant information.

TIP: Check the website's "About Us" page for more information about the organization and its partners and funders.



LEFT: Photo from Pexels
RIGHT: Photo from Pexels

4. Is complete contact information given?

Contact information, including the organization's name, is a clue about how reputable the providers are. It also allows you to contact the provider to ask more questions about the information they are providing.

TIP: Check for a mailing address, phone number and email address.

5. How good are the links to more information?

A good website points you to other credible sources to help you explore the topic further. A reputable website also maintains their links so they work.

TIP: Check out the links to other sources to verify the information being presented.

6. Is there a clear privacy policy about personal information?

If you have to register or provide personal information in order to use the website, you should know how the website will use your information. Legal problems can be personal. You should not have to give up your privacy to get good information.

TIP: Look for and review the provider's Privacy Policy.