

ANATOMY OF A URL

The first step in learning the grammar of the Internet is to read URLs closely. Reading a URL is an exercise in critical thinking. (Please note example site contains racist/offensive subject matter)

The goal is to make judgments about web site information based upon what the URL tells you. Here are three guiding questions that can help.

1. Do you recognize the domain name?

The domain name is found after the `http://` and `www.` to the first forward slash `/`. For example in the URL `www.novemberlearning.com`, `novemberlearning.com` is the domain name.

A domain name can sometimes provide clues about the quality of information of a site or tell you what a site is about.

2. What is the extension in the domain name?

`.com` and `.net` are examples of extensions. Extensions are an important part of domain names. You probably know quite a few already. Extensions are intended to show the type of establishment that owns and publishes the domain. Here is a list to look for:

COMMON EXTENSIONS

<code>.edu</code>	Educational organization (most US universities)
<code>.k12</code>	US school site (not all US schools use this)
<code>.ac</code>	Academic institution (outside of US)
<code>.sch</code>	School site (some schools outside of the US use this)
<code>.com</code>	Company (usually <code>.co</code> in the UK)
<code>.org</code>	Any organization
<code>.gov</code>	Government agency
<code>.net</code>	Network
<code>.mil</code>	Military institution

New extensions to look for are `.biz`, `.name`, `.pro`, `.info`. All are used for commercial purposes.

Extensions can also include country codes, such as `.uk`, `.ca`, `.za`, etc. For a complete list refer to: http://goes.gsfc.nasa.gov/text/web_country_codes.html

Some extensions may provide more reliable information than others, but there are no guarantees. Ones that may be more reliable are `.edu`, `.gov`, `.k12`. Ones to watch out for are `.com`, `.org`, `.net`. These domains can be purchased by anybody. This is not to say that sites with these extensions can never be trusted, but it is good to know whether you are on a commercial or special interest-type site if you are trying to access academic-type information.

3. Are you on a personal page?

You may or may not recognize the domain name or extension of a URL. Keep reading past the first forward slash / for more clues. If you are on a personal page the information you are reading may or may not be trustworthy.

A personal page is a web site created by an individual. The web site may contain useful information, links to important resources and helpful facts, but sometimes these pages offer highly biased opinions.

The presence of a name in the URL such as jdoe and a tilde ~ or % or the word users or people or members frequently means you are on a personal web site.

Even if a site has the extension, .edu, you still need to keep a look out for personal pages. Case in point is this web site previously available and published by a professor at Northwestern University:

<http://pubweb.northwestern.edu/~abutz/di/intro.html>

This site is a Holocaust Revisionist site that argues that the Holocaust did not take place. Although this site contains a domain name we should be able to trust northwestern.edu, the tilde ~ followed by someone's name, abutz tell us that this is a personal posting and not an official Northwestern page.

**Today, Professor Butz's site, describing the holocaust as an historic myth is no longer available at the original address. In fact, when you type in the address a screen from Northwestern appears that says the site is no longer available. The message is only accurate in part. The site is no longer available at the original address but it is available if you know how to research the history of a website with a special tool called the Wayback Machine. (see section VI)

Notice the second half of this URL. You'll see that this second half shows the actual former address of the site.**

