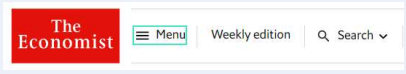
Websites: the fourteen "must-know" in a nutshell

1	 **Each website has a unique web address, or URL** (for Unique Resource Locator). It is located at the top of any webpage and corresponds backstage to an IP address (a series of numbers). The web address is easier to remember than the IP address. Searching information by web address is an alternative to using search engines. Today with most browsers' auto-complete features, you don't need to type the *https://* nor the *www.* segments, just the domain name (with or without the extension). This is a fast way of websearching for something and an alternative to exclusively using search engines, especially for small websites which might not have been indexed by search engines.
2	 **Each page of a website also has a unique web address**; the first part identifies the website owner details (as seen in 1.), the end, the file (last element, here the date), and where it is on the website structure (in which folders, to use a common computer term). Information seekers may play with the latter, to search for different versions (older or more recent) of a regular or country report for example. This is another way to directly reach a specific web element and bypass search engines.
3	Like in a book, the information on **a website is organized in different sections,** menus, or tabs (from 5 to 10), with their respective sub-sections/sub-menus (and possibly sub-sub sections or sub-sub menus). There are rarely more than four levels down; beyond, it becomes confusing for users and designers. This organization is said to be **hierarchical**; it is one of the ways humans make sense of and find their way among many pieces of information; they are conceptually linked (under a common heading) rather than free electrons.
4	**Sections** (menus) are **dependent** on the activities and topics of the web owner. They are often contextual, i.e. linked to what is needed at a certain point, which means they are dynamic, rather than fixed.
5	The different sections may be found in the **main menu** or the **navigation bar**. The navigation bar is a line of menus/tabs which is available at the top of webpages, like here with booking.com:

Today, because of mobile devices and their small screen, the main menu is often represented with 2 or 3 horizontal (or vertical) lines. It can be found at the top right of the screen (top left but much more rarely). This menu is sometimes called the “hamburger button”, suggestive of a list. Make sure to spot it. Some adopt a mixed approach, like here with *The Economist* home page, its 3 tabs, of which one is the hamburger button, which hides other menus behind



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Three **frequent sections** of a website are still *Home*, *About,* and *Contact*. Visit these, especially the *About*, to find information on the website owners, useful when you want to locate and assess a piece of information. Lately, the latter may be available at the bottom of each webpage (rather than behind one of the above sections/buttons). Finally, a website often opens with the so-called *Home* page (often represented with a home icon).

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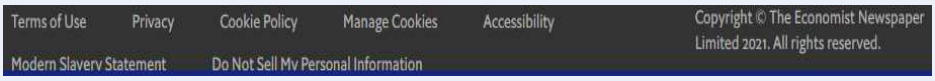

The **bottom of any webpage** is an important place to visit, to know more about the website, how recent it is, and its owner (as we saw in 6.). All the way down, you may find a copyright line, with 1 or 2 dates, sometimes the year it started and then when it was last modified. Visit the latter to know if the website is still active and maintained.
As seen above, with *The Economist* webpage, you may also find information, on data usage: *Terms of Use, Privacy* and *Cookie* Policies, a button to notify I don’t want my data to be sold, and even a *Modern Slavery Statement* (the latter is not common practice).

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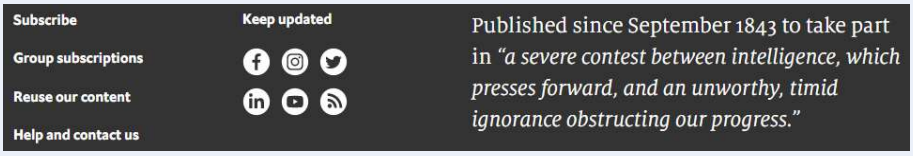
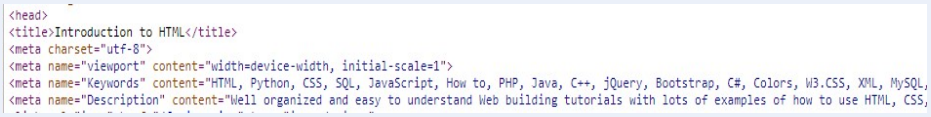


You may also find the famous icons to follow the web owner on different social media platforms (the latter may sometimes be on the top right of the webpage).

9	Above the copyright line, you often find the **structure of the website** with links, like a map to all that it contains, offering great shortcuts. It also gives you a helicopter view of what is available on the website and allows you to decide what you want to see, rather than blindly following threads (proposed by search engines). This general overview is sometimes available in the menu button at the top right of the screen. It is becoming a norm in many modern websites and is often found on all pages, or at least on the *Home* page. It replaces the S*itemap* page/links which were frequently available as a single webpage in the old days.
10	The bottom of webpages is a wealth of information that helps you situate and interpret the information on the web you are visiting. Make sure to visit it if you want to assess its information.
11	The middle of the webpage is the **body**. *Home* pages are especially valuable often giving clues on what the website is about, its style. The body can have many different types of contents, text, but also graphic elements, pictures, video, links and lots of advertisements too.
12	**Source code of any webpage**. In most browsers (Chrome, Edge, Firefox..) pressing *Ctrl* + *U* (or right-click, then select *View Source* on the window which pops up) opens the current webpage source code. HTML (for HyperText Markup Language) is the language used to design webpages (other languages may be used, especially when it comes to visual elements). If you look carefully in the code of any webpages, you see two main elements: plain words/sentences, then terms in <…>. The latter are **tags**, i.e. the formatted commands for a webpage, the instructions that determine what you see. For most, there is at least the opening and the closing tag. Here is the title tag : *<title> How to read source code </title>*.  Without entering into tech talks, information searchers should understand some of those tags, especially the three (as seen above) that come at the top of a code page. *<title>, <meta …" Keywords">, and <meta … "Description">* provide descriptors on what the page is about; here you find the keywords the web designers selected as the best ones for the webpage. Why not check them, first to have an overall view, finding what the page is about (according to its designers), but also to get the list of the keywords

	used. This may be useful when you are trying to find the best keywords for your search, and especially relevant if you want to find targeted webpages as the one you are viewing. web designers pay a lot of attention to using the right keywords so that search engines will stop, collect and rank their pages at the top. To find elements within the page code, don't forget to use *Ctrl+F*. What is presented above is very basic, webpage coding can be extremely complex, especially when it integrates multimedia. For more, websearch "*website source code read".*
13	Apart from the information the website contains, you may also learn many things by **analyzing its traffic**. This is interesting for the web owners, but also for the researchers. For example, when you need to get hard data on how a web service is used, an educational program for example, looking at its traffic may offer some valuable data. Many apps for this exist, such as *Similarweb*, *data.ai (ex AppAnnie)*, or *Semrush*. Websearch "*website traffic data analytics* or *analyze*" (early 2022).
14	Finally, the website world changes very fast. The above is current as of early 2022. To keep abreast, make sure to regularly check the web for the latest trends. For example, websearch "*website technology terminology development* and the *current year*".