



How To Evaluate Internet Sites

As more people gain access to information on the Web and more content is continuously added, it is important to know how to evaluate Web sites to determine if the information is reliable. Most Web content is posted without any form of review for accuracy or reliability, so it is up to you to make sure that the information you find is credible. Keep in mind: some Web pages are designed for misinformation, marketing tools, or subversive reasons, while others are meant to entertain. They may offer news, or may be for personal enjoyment. The following tips serve as a guide to evaluating information on the Web. To evaluate a Web page you'll need to look at the header, footer, main body, and URL to search for clues which will help you determine the accuracy, authority, coverage, currency and objectivity of that page.

Accuracy

How accurate is the information provided when checked against other sources or Web sites?

Is the Web page free of spelling or grammatical errors?

Are there footnotes, a bibliography, a works cited page, or links to sources?

Keep in Mind...

- Almost **anyone** can publish **anything** on the Web.
- Most information posted online is not verified, refereed, or reviewed, unlike most scholarly journals and books.
- Spelling errors not only indicate a lack of quality control, but can also produce inaccuracies in information.

Authority

Who is the author, publisher, or producer of the Web page?

Is it clear who is sponsoring the page?

Can you contact the author, publisher, or producer?

What are that person's or organization's qualifications on the subject covered by the page (credibility)?

Look at the header or footer for information showing affiliation.

Look closely at the URL and domain for clues.

Keep in Mind...

- It's hard to determine who is the author of a Web page.
- If an author's name is listed - the qualifications are usually absent.
- Sponsorship or publisher responsibility isn't often indicated.
- The Webmaster or designer of a site should not necessarily be considered the author.

Coverage

Is the site in-depth or a brief summary on the subject?

What does this page offer that is not found elsewhere?

What topics does this site cover?

Are there any inexplicable omissions?

Keep in Mind...

- Web coverage often differs from print coverage.
- It's often difficult to determine the extent of Web page coverage.
- Sometimes Web information is posted for amusement or subversive reasons.

Currency

When was the page created or last updated? (The footer often gives these dates)

Is the information listed out-of-date?

If there are links, have they expired or moved?

Keep in Mind...

- Dead links may be a sign of "stale" information.
- Publication or revision dates are not always included in Web pages.
- If a date is provided, it may have various meanings:
 - It may indicate when the material was first written.
 - It may indicate when the material was first placed on the Web.
 - It may indicate when the material was last revised.

Objectivity

What goals or objectives does this page meet?

Is the page free of advertising?

Is the site intended to inform or teach, or to persuade or sell you on something?

Does it cover multiple sides of a topic, or does it promote only one viewpoint?

Keep in Mind...

- Goals or aims of persons or groups presenting material are often not clearly stated.
- The Web often serves as a virtual soapbox.
- The presence of advertising indicates sponsorship, which may indicate a bias.

How to Find Quality Web Sites

Something that can help a great deal in Web searching is to use portals that link ONLY to well-reviewed resources:

The Librarians' Index to the Internet <http://lii.org>

About.com Guide to Web Search <http://websearch.about.com/internet/websearch/library/>

Contains many useful resources. Annotated, subject links for specific kinds of searches are included plus a free weekly newsletter.

Infomine <http://infomine.ucr.edu/>

Searchable database of Scholarly Internet Resource Collections. Site authored and maintained by the University of California Libraries.

Other Websites

Search Engine Watch <http://searchenginewatch.com/>

This website provides a guide to the different search engines as well as reviews of different search engines, tips for searching websites to search engines and suggestions for more effective websearching.

Search Engine Showdown <http://www.searchengineshowdown.com/>

This website compares the different search engines with detailed charts and analysis. The site also provides news of new features and other developments among the various search engines.

For More Information

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