

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 can be difficult to determine who is the author of a Web page.
- If an author's name is listed, a description of their qualifications may be 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 does it offer only 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 for satirical or subversive reasons.
For example: www.theonion.com.

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 for personal opinions, business advertising, and political agendas.
- 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 and authoritative resources:

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

Offers librarian-recommended websites on many popular research topics.

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

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

www.usa.gov

This is a good introductory site for information published by the U.S. government on many different topics.

Other Websites

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.

**If you need further information, call the Bell Library reference desk at 361-825-2609
or inquire by e'mail using the "Ask a Librarian" form at <http://rattler.tamucc.edu/asklib/index.php>**