

## Evaluating Web Sites

Just because you've finally found a web site about your topic, does not necessarily mean that it's reliable. Use the criteria below to be sure that the web site you are receiving information from is a good source.

### **Scope:**

- Who was the site written for? Is it geared toward a particular audience, age group, or level of expertise? Is the audience level appropriate for your needs?
- Are all aspects of the topic covered? Are all points of view represented? Is the coverage in depth or just skims the surface? How does this resource compare to other information you've seen on the topic? Does this add new or unique information about the topic?
- What is the purpose of the site? Does it fulfill its purpose? Is it to inform, explain, persuade, sell a product, advocate a cause, make a political point, parody a person or organization or idea, report research, to present opinions, etc?
- Are there visual aids to enhance the text? Is it all images or a balance of text and images? What is the quality of the images? Do these images enhance the resource or distract from the content?

### **Treatment:**

- Is the information presented as fact or opinion? Can the factual information be verified through footnotes or bibliographies to other credible sources? Has the information in the work been transcribed from another source?
- Does the page present the information in a usable format? Is the information clearly written? Are there obvious typos, misspelled words or other signs of sloppiness? Is the information presented cited correctly? Is the information organized in a useful way?
- Does the source display a particular bias, prejudice, or perspective? Is it clear and forthcoming about its view of the subject? Does it use inflammatory or provocative language?
- Are there links to other resources on the topic? Are the links well chosen, well organized, and evaluated or annotated? Do the links work? Are they pointing to reliable sources? Do the links represent other viewpoints? Do the links selected indicate a bias?

### **Authority:**

- Is the author of the page clearly identified? Is there contact information for the author?
- What is the writer's credentials, experience, or education in the subject area? Are they qualified to write on the topic? Has the author written anything else on the topic? What is the author's reputation? Might the person be a hobbyist, self-proclaimed expert, or enthusiast? Is the author affiliated with an organization?
- Is the publisher or sponsoring organization of the page clearly identified? Is there a link to the organization's web page? Is there contact information for the organization? What is the reputation/credibility of the organization?

Could this result in biased information? Does it make sense for this organization to support the content of the web page?

- Check the URL (address) of the page. Does the domain name match the organization's? Should it? Is it a personal page? A tilde (~) or percent sign (%) followed by a name usually indicates that the page belongs to an individual, not an organization. Is the address a commercial ISP or web hosting provider like Geocities?
- Does the domain suffix indicate that the page comes from: .edu – an educational institution, .gov – government agency, .mil – military agency, .org – non-profit organization, .com – commercial (for profit) company, or .net – Internet Service Provider?

**Relevance:**

- Does the source address your topic? In a positive or negative way? Does it support your point of view? Is the information consistent with other sources? Are there references to additional resources?
- Does the site contain original information or is it simply a list of links?
- Does the page contain advertising? Are the ads clearly distinguishable from the content? Is there any conflict of interest between the ads and the content?
- Is this resource as good as one you could find using the library's resources? Are you requiring the same amount of 'proof' you would from a print source?

**Timeliness:**

- Is the information sufficiently current for your purpose? Is the information outdated? Is this a time sensitive or newly evolving topic? Is the information still useful?
- Is it clear when the information was originally published? Is this the most recent edition? How frequently is it updated?
- When was the web site last updated? Are there any 'dead' links on the page which might suggest it has not been updated recently? Are there clear and obvious pointers to new content?

\*CAUTION\* - Undated statistical information is no better than anonymous information and should not be used.

**For More Information about Evaluating Web Sites:**

[libweb.sonoma.edu/assistance/eval](http://libweb.sonoma.edu/assistance/eval)

[school.discovery.com/schrockguide/eval.html](http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/eval.html)

[www3.baylor.edu/~Billie\\_Peterson/checklist.html](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Billie_Peterson/checklist.html)

[www.lib.umn.edu/research/instruction/lessons/start\\_ass\\_ba.phtml](http://www.lib.umn.edu/research/instruction/lessons/start_ass_ba.phtml)