

Evaluating Web Resources

The quality of information available on the Internet can vary considerably, and the ability to critically evaluate Web resources is an important skill. The Internet is a system of networks that connects millions of computers globally and serves as a communications tool. The Web is one portion of the Internet that provides a way of presenting information using text, images, graphics, sound, and video. No organization oversees or critically evaluates the content of all Web sites. Therefore, it is important to analyze Web resources for content, validity, accuracy and appropriateness just as you would assess the value of a book or an article.

Below is a list of topics and related questions to assist you in selecting and evaluating Web resources for your research.

♦ **AUTHORITY**

- Is an author identified?
- Who or what organization is responsible for the site?
- Who or what organization is the source of the information?
- Is the site sponsored by an organization or company? If so, is this information prominently and clearly displayed?
- Is there an individual, corporation or organization with editorial control over the content?
- Can you verify the expertise or qualifications of the author, sponsor or editor?
- Is there a name, phone number, mailing address, or e-mail address to contact the author, organization, editor or sponsor of the page?

♦ **ACCURACY**

- Can the information be verified in other sources, print or non-print?
- Are facts well documented?
- Is the source considered reliable? For example, a web page of *The New York Times*.
- If data are included, is the source of the data indicated?
- Is the source of the data trustworthy? For example, the *U. S. Census Bureau* or the *Pew Research Center*.

♦ **OBJECTIVITY**

- Does the page seem objective in the presentation of information?
- Does the page show any bias for or against a particular point of view?
- Are services or products being marketed or advertised?
- Does the author or sponsor of the page advocate any specific viewpoints or causes?

♦ **DATE OR TIMELINESS**

- When was the page last updated?
- Is there a clear indication of the frequency of the updates?
- How current are the links?
- Is the content up-to-date?

- ♦ **RELEVANCE**
 - Is the information provided by the site relevant to your research purpose?
 - Does the information contribute a meaningful perspective to your research question?
 - Is the information significant and appropriate for your research?

- ♦ **COVERAGE**
 - How comprehensive is the source?
 - How does it compare with other electronic or print sources providing similar information?
 - Does the site provide a description or introduction to the content?
 - Can you tell what is included or excluded?
 - Is the material excerpted or abstracted in any way?
 - Does the Web page offer information not found elsewhere?

- ♦ **AUDIENCE**
 - Is the site directed toward a particular audience?
 - What is the purpose of the site?
 - Is the information intended for consumers, employees, investors, students, researchers, specialists, or experts?

- ♦ **REVIEWS**
 - Is there an independent review available for this site?
 - Has the site received any awards for excellence?

- ♦ **QUALITY OF THE PAGE**
 - Do most of the links work?
 - Does the page provide references or links to additional resources?
 - Are the references or links accurate?
 - Is the page well organized and easy to navigate?
 - Is the Web site fast or slow in terms of response time?
 - Are there any (or too many) advertisements?
 - Is the page well maintained?

- ♦ **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**
 - Consider using several types of Web sites: .edu, .org, .gov, .com
 - Try using Google Scholar to limit your results to scholarly or academic articles.
 - As a general rule, you should use more than one search engine (Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc.) when researching a topic. Each search engine uses unique algorithms for searching the Web and will find diverse sites and rank them differently in the results list.