
Evaluating Web Resources

The World Wide Web can be a great resource to find research on a huge variety of topics. However, producing websites is easy, cheap, free, and most importantly, unregulated and unmonitored. Unlike print resources, there are no review boards, editors, or proofreaders to verify information available on the Web. Warning: ANYBODY CAN CREATE A WEBSITE.

What does this mean to you? Never assume the information presented is correct. The burden is on you to evaluate the authority, reliability, timeliness, content and structure of the web pages.

How do you accomplish this? Use the criteria listed below, along with your research experience, to efficiently identify valuable web-based information.

Authority

- Is the author/producer of the site readily identifiable? (usually located in the footer)
- Does the website state the name of the individual or organization? Is contact information, such as an email-link, clearly visible on the site?
- What is the author's educational background or level of expertise?
- Is he/she affiliated with a reputable university or organization?

Reliability

- Does the site have an academic, governmental, or commercial affiliation? Is the source a newsgroup? Nonprofit sites usually have *.edu*, *.gov*, or *.org* in the domain. These sites provide some of the most valuable information available on the Internet.
- How objective or biased is the information?
- Is there a political, social or commercial agenda?
- Does the information try to inform or persuade?
- Is there a list of references or works cited?
- Is there information provided to support statements of fact?

Be careful of sites with the domain **.com**. They may contain useful information but they are generally a business advertising a particular product.

Timeliness

- ❑ When was the site created and first placed on the web? (usually located at the footer)
- ❑ Has the site been updated recently or reflect changes in the kind of information you are looking for? Is a “Last Update” notice on the page? (For instance, medical information and statistics should be updated frequently, as opposed to historical information).
- ❑ How up-to-date are the links? Any links on a web page should also contain up-to-date information.

Timeliness is *very* important for medical and science information.

Content

- ❑ Is there a statement about the purpose of the website? An “*About Us*” link that explains subject coverage? Is the site a collection of links to other sites or does it actually have files of potentially useful information?
- ❑ Does the information covered meet your information needs?
- ❑ How comprehensive and accurate are the information and the links provided?
- ❑ How does the website compare to print information resources available on this topic?
- ❑ Are there any typographical, grammatical, or spelling errors?

When in doubt...

Seek out additional print and electronic resources (books, scholarly journal articles, research papers, etc.) to verify the information located on the website.

“Webmaster” is an individual who has formatted a web page; he/she may have nothing to do with the creation of content.

Ask a Reference Librarian.