

Evaluating Internet Resources

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Why evaluate?

- Anyone can publish web content
- Many pages do not get updated
- No quality control/standards
 - Most sites are not "peer-reviewed"
 - Most sites are not even edited
- Most information is unfiltered
- The Web often functions as a soapbox
- It is often difficult to determine authorship

Evaluation criteria

- Authority
- Currency
- Accuracy
- Scope
- Objectivity
- Documentation
- Design

Authority

- Who is responsible for the content?
- What are the author's qualifications?
- Can you identify a parent organization or sponsor?
- What are the organization's or sponsor's qualifications?
- Are there credentials and contact information for the author?

Currency

- When was the page written?
- When was the page published?
- When was the page last updated?
- Are there broken links?

Accuracy

- Is the information recent where appropriate?
- Is the information detailed and comprehensive?
- Are there grammatical errors?

Scope

- Is it an overview or specific information?
- Is it too specific or general for your information needs?
- Is there an intended audience?
- Does the site satisfy the needs of the audience?

Objectivity

- How much bias is evident in the content?
- Does the content seem fair, balanced and reasonable?
- Are there any conflicts of interest?
- Are they trying to sell you something?
- Is sponsorship acknowledged?
- Is the purpose of the site clearly stated?

Documentation

- Are there citations?
- Does the site link to other reputable sites?
- Who links to this site? Are they reputable?
- Are there graphs, tables, illustrations to support the claims?
- Are there explanations of research methods?

Design

- Is the site organized?
- Is there an internal search engine?
- Are there features that increase usability?
- Can you access content without additional viewers or plugins?
- Is the site user friendly?

Before you view:

- Look at the URL
 - Can you tell if this is a personal page or a group page?
 - The tilde character (~) often indicates a personal Web site.
- Check the domain
 - Is it .edu, .gov, .mil?
 - Is it .com, .net, .org, a country code?
- Does the domain match the content?
 - Is it news from the source? www.nytimes.com
 - Is it advice from an agency? www.nih.gov

Scan the home page

- Find credential for the content:
 - About us, Philosophy, Background, Biography
- How old is the page?
 - Look for a “last updated” date
- Can you tell who wrote the content?
 - Name of page author
 - Name of hosting entity
 - Organization, institution, agency info

Examine the content

- Text
 - Is the text HTML or a scan?
 - Are there links to the original?
- Sources
 - Documented with links or notes?
 - Are the links broken?
- Evidence of Bias
 - Does text have a neutral tone?
 - Do sources show variety?

Check it out

- Search the URL in alexa.com
- <http://domaintrakker.com/>
- In Google – allinanchor:yoursite.com
- In Yahoo and Altavista – linkdomain:yoursite.com
- See which blogs link to the site
 - Try the URL in Google Blog Search
- See the 'similar' links in Google
- Google the page author
- Snopes.com

Is the content right for you?

- What is the purpose of the page?
 - Information?
 - Education?
 - Persuasion?
 - Commerce?
 - Parody or satire?
- Is the content appropriate for your purpose?

Domains

- www.whitehouse.gov - .gov
- www.whitehouse.net - .net
- www.whitehouse.com - .com
- www.lesley.edu - .edu
- www.navy.mil - .mil
- www.rtda.org - .org
- www.government.fi – country sites
- .museum, .info, .biz,

Examples

- Authority
 - www.martinlutherking.org/
 - www.thekingcenter.org
- Currency
 - www.cnn.com
 - www.farfieldtechnology.com/products/toolbox/pointcloud/
- Accuracy
 - <http://descy.50megs.com/akcj3/bmd.html>
 - www.dogbreedinfo.com/bernesemountain.htm
- Scope
 - www.tmz.com/

More Examples

- Objectivity
 - www.beefnutrition.org
 - <http://www.ihr.org/>
- Documentation
 - www.melatonin.com
 - www.mayoclinic.com/health/melatonin
 - www.lipbalmanonymous.com/
- Design
 - <http://www.pinkberry.com/>
 - <http://www.mogiespub.com/>