
HOW TO EVALUATE A WEBSITE:

Tips for Finding Quality Information

Students may choose a number of different types of resources for academic study including library databases and other online sources. When venturing out on the world wide web, however, it is important to evaluate what you find in terms of **Timeliness, Reliability, Authority, and Purpose**. You want to T-R-A-P only quality, accurate, and unbiased information. It is sometimes difficult to find all the pieces you need to evaluate web sites and to cite them, so here are a few tips:.

Timeliness (*when?*)

- Look for the date last updated (usually found at the bottom of the page). Is only the home page updated or subsequent pages reviewed as well? Be aware that some websites automatically update the date without making substantive changes.
- Do links work or are there a lot of dead ones?
- Look at ‘upcoming events’, ‘news’ and other date-sensitive sections to see how current the postings are.

Reliability (*how?*)

Look for indicators of credible and accurate information.

- Look for ‘Links’, ‘Additional sites’, ‘Related Links’.
- Explore little footnote numbers or links that refer to documentation as well as the bibliography– where do these lead you and what sources are cited?
- Look for copyright statements (usually at the bottom of the page) and/or permission to reprint.
- Are there spelling and/or typographical errors?

Authority (*who?*)

Look at the URL.

- Who published the site? (usually named in the first portion of the URL – ex: www.mxcc.edu)
- Can you email or call the author or organization? Are credentials given and is the author qualified?
- Is it someone’s personal page? Do you see a personal name following a ~, %, or the words ‘users’, ‘members’, or ‘people’? (You’ll need to investigate the author carefully.)
- What is the domain name and is it appropriate for the information? (ex: .edu, .gov, .com, .org)

Scan the webpage (top, bottom, and side) for information such as *author, organization, and title*.

- Look for ‘About Us’, ‘Philosophy’, ‘Background’, ‘Biography’.
- Truncate the URL by deleting all the way to the first slash mark. (it usually brings you back to the home page where you may find this info)
- Use the title shown in the browser title bar in your bibliography. However, if the title shown in the title bar does not really describe the page content, use the title shown on the page itself.
- Is the website a mask for advertising?

Find out more about the web page.

- Type the URL into <http://www.alexa.com>– look at traffic details, related links, and more.
- Do a link: search in [Google](http://www.google.com) (ex: link:www.mxcc.edu) to find out what other sites link to the webpage. Are these reputable?
- Use [Whois lookup](http://www.whois.com) via register.com to find out who has registered the website.

Purpose (*why? what?*)

- Is the information intended for a particular audience based on expertise (scholarly or general interest), age, group affiliation, or some other criteria (such as a potential sales customer)?
- Is the information on topic and does it suit your needs? Does it add anything to what you already have?
- Is the information freely accessible, or do you have to pay for what you need?
- Can you view and print the information with ease (no additional software required)? Is the site relatively free of advertisement, pop-ups, and useless animation?

Resources consulted: Center for Learning and Teaching, SUNY Empire State College. “Evaluating Web Pages: Techniques to Apply & Questions to Ask.” *Finding Information on the Internet: A Tutorial*. May 2009. UC Berkeley Library. 6 July 2009 <<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>>. Kapoun, Jim. “Teaching undergrads WEB evaluation: A guide for library instruction.” C&RL News (July/August 1998): 522-523.