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## CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING WEBSITES

### 1. Origin / Authority (author, webmaster, or publisher)

- Who is the author of the website?
- Is there a link to contact the author?
- What do you already know about the author?
- Does the author have the expertise to give reliable information on the subject? Is h/she an expert in the field? Is h/she associated with an organization that does research on the website's topic?
- Does the author demonstrate knowledge of the subject and how that subject fits into its broader context?
- What type of organization is the publisher? What does the domain name tell you about the website?
  - .com = commercial / business organizations
  - .edu = educational institutions
  - .gov = government agencies
  - .net = network resources
  - .org = non-profit / other organizations
- What authority does the publisher have to put up a website on the topic in question?
- What role does the publisher play in discussions on the subject?
- Who is the webmaster?

### 2. Purpose

- Is the intended audience easily identifiable?
- Is the intent of the information clearly stated or implied?  
The intent can be to: Inform, teach, sell, persuade, or entertain

### 3. Objectivity or Bias

- To what extent is the information intended to sway the opinion of the audience?
- Are the goals of the author and/or publisher clearly stated?
- Does the author/creator have an obvious agenda?
- Does the publisher have an agenda?
- Does the website link to organizations with an obvious agenda?
- Does the webmaster have links to organizations with an agenda?
- Is there any advertising on the page, and if so, is it clearly differentiated from the informational content?
- *Examples of different websites discussing smoking and tobacco:*  
*Philip Morris USA (<http://www.philipmorrisusa.com/home.asp>)*  
*United States. Dept. of Health & Human Services. Safety and Wellness. (<http://www.os.dhhs.gov/safety/index.shtml>)*

### 4. Accuracy

- How accurate is the information? Is it fact or opinion? Are the facts documented?
- Are the sources used for factual information made easily accessible so that the information can be verified? Is there a bibliography or list of references/resources provided?
- Is the text well written and free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?

### 5. Relevance

- Is the information relevant to your research?
- Does the information you find add to what you have already obtained from print resources?

### 6. Coverage

- Is it clear what the topic of the site is?
- To what depth is the topic covered?
- Is the coverage complete? Do you still have questions after perusing the site?
- Is it clear that the site is complete, or is it still under construction?

## 7. Currency

- How current is the information?
- Does the site include a publication date?
- What was it last updated?
- Are there dead links?

## 8. Design

### Visual Message

- What additional information does the layout convey?
- What is the emotional or cultural content of the visual argument?
- What is emphasized by the layout? With what effect?
- Is there information missing from the visual message? For what purpose?

### General Design

- Is the site easy to navigate? Is it confusing?
- Do the pages load properly?
- Does the layout/design support the verbal content?
- Do the links work?

(Adapted from the University of South Dakota's  
"Gateway to Information Literacy Assessment"  
([http://www.usd.edu/library/assessment\\_gateway](http://www.usd.edu/library/assessment_gateway)))