

WEBSITE EVALUATION

Why is it important to know how to evaluate web resources?

- So that you will be able to find the **best** web resources/information for your research—the most accurate, most current, most appropriate, easiest to navigate, etc.

What is the web?

- A global Internet service connecting hypertext data and resources. It organizes information by pages that are accessible through a browser (e.g. Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox). You can move quickly from one website to another in search of information, graphics, and data.
- Its main functions: Information sharing, education, commerce, entertainment, and communication (personal and organizational)

How selective is the web?

- Information found in resources (whether in paper or electronically based) is only as reliable as the scrutiny (i.e., editorial review) it receives from editors/experts before publication
- Books and articles are generally subject to this review and are therefore usually more reliable reference sources
- Books and journals are selected by librarians for quality
- Websites are **not** subject to any review/selection process and should be treated critically by the user. There is **no** oversight committee, organization, or company that looks at or verifies the truth, validity, currency, or quality of the information put on to the web.

<u>BOOKS</u>	<u>ARTICLES</u>	<u>WEBSITES</u>
Editors review and select; process can be long, involving many rewrites	Editors review and select; articles can go through several rewrites	No one/Everyone is "in charge"
Publishers try to maintain reputations for quality	Publishers try to maintain reputations for quality	Anyone can create and "publish" anything ; there are no standards
Libraries select based on reviews (written by experts)	Scholarly journals select articles based on peer review	Search engines are not selective on the basis of quality
Libraries select based on publishers' reputations	Periodical indexes select journals based on quality	Only subject indexes select sites based on quality

Tools for Searching the Web

(Search Engines, Meta-Search Engines, Subject Directories)

- They are listings of what is available on the web
- Each search engine accesses only a portion of what is available from the web
- Search engines provide different search features
- They do not guarantee the quality (or truth) of information contained in websites
- Since software cannot be programmed to recognize quality of information, search engines that rank websites generally do so on the basis of criteria other than quality

Search Engines

- Computer software programs designed to help users of the Internet locate information on the world wide web
- Collect and index Internet resources and provide a keyword search system allowing the user to identify and retrieve resources
- *Examples: Google, Alta Vista, Lycos*
- **NOTE:** No search engine accesses the entire web, and search engines do not all access the same websites

Meta-Search Engines

- Have many of the same characteristics as search engines, but they search multiple search engines at the same time
- *Examples: Dogpile, MetaCrawler, ProFusion*

Subject-Based Search Engines

- Similar to search engines except that they are subject-specific in their access
- *Examples: HealthWeb, MusicSearch*

Subject Directories

- Also know as "web guides"
- Contain web pages collected and indexed on particular topics
- *Example: Yahoo!*
- *Examples of reliable subject directories:*
 - *Librarian's Index to the Internet (<http://www.lii.org>)*
 - *Digital Librarian (<http://www.digital-librarian.com>)*
 - *INFOMINE (<http://infomine.ucr.edu>)*
 - *Bethel University Library's Quick Facts & General Reference List*
(See the Library's Homepage at <http://library.bethel.edu>)

Criteria for Evaluating Websites

(Content information used by publishers, editors, and librarians for books and articles)

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))