

Evaluation Criteria for Web Sites



Accuracy

Accuracy is important because:

1. Anyone can publish anything on the web
2. Unlike traditional print resources, web resources rarely have editors or fact-checkers
3. Currently, no web standards exist to ensure accuracy

Use the following questions to evaluate accuracy:

- ✓ Is the information reliable?
- ✓ Is there an editor or someone who verifies/checks the information?

Authority

Authority is important because:

1. See number 1 above
2. It's often hard to determine a Web page's authorship
3. Even if a page is signed, qualifications aren't usually given
4. Sponsorship isn't usually indicated

Use the following questions to evaluate authority:

- ✓ Is there an author? Is the page signed?
- ✓ Is the author qualified? An expert?
- ✓ Who is the sponsor? Is the sponsor of the page reputable? How reputable?
- ✓ Is there a link to information about the author or the sponsor?
- ✓ If the page includes neither a signature, nor indicates a sponsor, is there any other way to determine its origin? (Look for a header or footer showing affiliation; Look at the URL. <http://www.fbi.gov>; and/or, look at the domain. **.edu**, **.com**, **.org**.)

Objectivity

Objectivity is important because:

1. Frequently the goals of the sponsors/authors aren't clearly stated.
2. Often the Web serves as a virtual "soapbox," for a person or organization with a specific social, personal or political agenda.

Use the following questions to evaluate objectivity:

- ✓ Does the information show a minimum of bias?
- ✓ Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- ✓ Is there any advertising on the page?

Currency

Currency is important because:

1. The publication or revision dates are not always provided.
2. If a date is provided, it may have various meanings. For example: It may indicate when the material was first written; it may indicate when the material was first placed on the Web; or it may indicate when the material was last revised.

Use the following questions to evaluate currency:

- ✓ Is the page dated?
- ✓ If so, when was the last update?
- ✓ How current are the links? Have some expired or moved?

Coverage

Coverage is important because:

1. Web coverage often differs from print coverage.
2. Frequently, it's difficult to determine the extent of coverage
3. Sometimes web information is just-for-fun or outright silliness

Use the following questions to evaluate coverage:

- ✓ What topics are covered?
- ✓ What does this page offer that is not found elsewhere?
- ✓ What is its intrinsic value?
- ✓ How in-depth is the material?

This handout adapted from: Beck, Susan. "Evaluation Criteria." *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly: or, Why It's a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources*. 2003.
<http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html>