

Authority:

- Who published the document and is it separate from the 'Webmaster'? Can you identify an institution or organization? This information can give credibility & could mean that the information has been reviewed by experts.
- Does the publisher list his or her qualifications? This could give credibility to the page.
- Is there a bibliography or selected reading list given? Do other Web pages cite the same sources? A good source will always cite sources.
- If the writer makes it hard for you to check the facts then be suspicious! Check the domain too. For research purposes, .edu, .gov, .org, .net are preferred domains.

Objectivity:

- What is the purpose of this Web page? (e.g., advertising, advocacy, news, entertainment, opinion, fandom, etc.) Is it appropriate for an assignment?
- Are they selling something? If the author is promoting a product or company will they present the information fairly? *Probably not!*
- Is the tone or language used moderate & balanced or is it emotional or extreme?

- How detailed is the information? Does the author give supporting evidence (facts or statistics)? A good source will always support their argument.
- You need to ask these questions in order to identify biasness. A good source would give the information objectively with limited advertising.

Currency:

- When was the page produced?
- When was it updated? A good source should be current and updated regularly.
- Are the links all active? How many dead links are on the page?
- Is the information out dated? Compare the information with your textbook or a library book.

Coverage:

- Is access to the information free or is there a fee? You shouldn't need to pay for information. Your Resource Centre already has access to excellent online databases.
- Do you need special software to view the page?
- Do other Web pages cite this page? If others cite this page, it could help establish credibility.

Guide to Evaluating Web Sites



WHY YOU NEED TO EVALUATE WEB PAGES?

1. Anyone with Internet access can create and mount a Web page.
2. Nobody censors information on the Web.
3. No one checks the accuracy or authority of the author.

Accuracy = contains no mistakes

Authority = the author is an expert

4. There is a lot of commercial publishing and sponsoring of Web pages.
5. Someone can mount a Web page and never update or remove the old information.

HOW TO AVOID BAD INFORMATION:

1. Know your subject/topic. Use textbooks, library books, or other resources that are recommended by your teacher or librarian to learn the basics of your topic. Look up terms in dictionaries and encyclopedias for a brief introduction.
2. Identify the type of Web page that you have found.
 - Is it a commercial page or is it a personal Web page?
3. Identify the origin of the Web page.

- a. Check the URL to see if the domain name ends in a .com (commercial), a .gov (governmental), an .org (not-for-profit), a .net (network), an .edu (educational), or a 2-letter code (country of origin).
 - b. A tilde (~) in the last part of the address like:
home.utm.utoronto.ca/~y_amm/on/Essay.htm usually means that the page is a personal homepage. **Be careful using personal web pages for school assignments.**
4. Use the appropriate search tools. If you are looking for newspaper or magazine articles then you should be using the online databases that are available in the Resource Centre.
 5. Use a set of criteria to evaluate each page that you use for your school assignment.

5 CRITERIA

Not all Web pages are created equal!

When you are researching on the Internet you need to look at the information with a critical eye. Use these 5 criteria to evaluate the information before you add it to your bibliography.

1. **Accuracy**
2. **Authority**
3. **Objectivity**
4. **Currency**

5. Coverage

Accuracy:

- Who wrote the Web page? Check for a name, or copyright credit, or a name of an organization.
- Can you contact the author? A good source should give you a way of contacting them if you have any questions or need further information.
- Is the author qualified to write this document? A good source would give some biographical information about the author and provide his or her credentials.
- Are there any factual errors? Compare the information on the Web page with the facts in your textbook or library books. Do you see any spelling or grammar mistakes?

Sources consulted:

"Evaluating web pages." Guide to Library Research. 2001. Duke University Libraries. 26 October 2002 <
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Kapoun, Jim. "Teaching undergrads WEB evaluation: A guide for library instruction." C&RL News (July/August 1998): 522-523.

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