

# Evaluating Information Found On The World Wide Web

Not all material published on the Internet is of equal quality. Almost anyone can publish anything on the Web without having it first verified by editors or fact checkers. Just as printed information needs to be viewed with a critical eye, Web resources need to be evaluated for authority, accuracy, and other criteria. Learning how to filter information you find on the Internet is a good beginning for becoming a wise consumer of information in all forms. Evaluate each document before you use it by asking yourself the questions in this checklist.

## Authorship

- Is the author clearly stated?
- What are the author's qualifications? Institutional affiliation?
- Is the author well-known and respected in his or her field?
- Is the author mentioned in a positive way by another authority you trust?
- If none of the above is present, is there contact information given (other than an email address) that would allow you to verify the author?

## Publishing Body

- Is the name of any organization given on the page?
- Is this organization recognized in the field you are studying? Try to use information from government agencies, trade or professional associations, major universities, or research centers.
- Does the page actually reside in an individual's personal Internet account? This is frequently the case if the URL contains a tilde (~), e.g., [http://www.someschool.edu/~olson/get\\_rich.html](http://www.someschool.edu/~olson/get_rich.html) or <http://www.geocities.com/johnsmith/mywebpage.html>. Approach this type of resource with caution.
- Check to see if the URL moves or disappears abruptly. Reliable Web sites establish markers to help you easily find new locations of pages.

## Point of View or Bias

- Is the author or publisher trying to promote a particular philosophical viewpoint or political agenda? Try to determine this by examining the URL and by reading other pages on the Web site. Businesses, political groups, and advocacy groups usually have some bias.
- Does the Web site have a stated purpose?
- Is the page an advertisement for something?
- Is this Web site hosted by or affiliated with an organization or Web server with a political or philosophical agenda?

## Accuracy

- Did you find this document through a link on another page whose quality you trust?
- Does the document cite (or link to) other sources or include a bibliography?
- For a research document, is there an explanation of how the data was gathered and interpreted?
- Could you verify the background information that was used?
- Can the author be contacted by mail or e-mail for clarification or to be informed of new information?
- Is the text well-written? Is it free of grammatical, spelling, and other typographical errors?
- Is it clear who has the ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the material?

## Currency

- Is it clear when the page was created? Copyrighted? Last updated?
- If the text is based on another source, does it indicate the date of that source (e.g., "Based on 1990 US Census data...")?

## Appropriateness

- Did you get the best information? Did you miss any good Web sites?
- Does a more "traditional" source in the library, such as a reference book or journal article database, provide superior information?
- If you found this website through an Internet search engine such as Google, you need to know how this search engine decides the placements of results. Some engines allow companies to pay for top placement.

***More questions? Ask a librarian! Stop by the Reference Desk or call 651-690-6652***