

Evaluating Web Resources



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The World Wide Web offers students, teachers and researchers the opportunity to find information and data from all over the world. The Web is easy to use, both for finding information and for publishing it. Because so much information is available, and because that information can appear to be fairly "anonymous", it is necessary to develop skills to evaluate what you find. Because anyone can write a Web page, documents of the widest range of quality, written by authors of the widest range of authority, are available on an "even playing field." Excellent resources reside alongside the most dubious.

Though many search engines rank material according to their idea of what is relevant, that doesn't mean the material is relevant to you or that it is reliable. These guidelines will help you become familiar with various types of Web resources and the reliability of the information provided.

Criteria For Web Page Evaluation:

1. What evidence is there that the author of the Web information has some authority in the field about which he or she is providing information? What are the author's qualifications, credentials, and connections to the topic?
2. Is the author affiliated or associated with any well-known organization or institution? Is there a link to the sponsoring organization, a contact number and/or address or e-mail contact?
3. Are there clues that the author is biased? For example, is the author selling or promoting a product? Is the author taking a personal stand on a social/political issue or being objective? Is the author part of or representing a group that may be biased? Bias is not necessarily "bad," but all connections should be clear.
4. Is the information current? Check links to other web sites as well as the date the page was last updated. If there are links that do not work or the page has not been updated in some time, the information included may not be current.
5. Does the page have a complete list of works cited that reference credible, well-known sources? If the information is not corroborated by external sources, what is the author's relationship to the subject? Can he or she give an "expert" opinion? Are all resources web-based or are there credible print sources listed also?

6. On what kind of Web site does the information appear? The site can give you clues about the credibility of the source. A personal homepage might not be as credible as a professional or educational web page. Look at the URL and backtrack to find the original institution offering the page.
7. Is the page cluttered or loaded with unnecessary graphics? An overabundance of images that are not related to the content of the page is sometimes used to compensate for a lack of quality information. Too many "bells and whistles" may indicate that the author is not serious about the content of the page.
8. Is the page visually appealing and well organized with information offered in an easy-to-use searchable format? A page that buries content may have something to hide.

For more information, check out:

Critical Evaluation Information

<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/eval.html>

Evaluating Quality on the Net

<http://www.hopetillman.com/findqual.html>

The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly

<http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/eval.html>

How to Evaluate the Information Sources You Find

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/evaluate.html>

Information Quality WWW Virtual Library

<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-InfoQuality.html>

UCLA College Library: Thinking Critically About WWW Resources

<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/index.htm>

Tips for Evaluating a World Wide Web Search

<http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/admin/wwwtips.pdf>