



The A B C Ds of Evaluating Internet Resources

The World Wide Web is a self-publishing medium where anyone with the appropriate computer, software, and an Internet connection can create and disperse information. Web pages should be evaluated carefully using some of the same criteria one uses to evaluate a print source. Be aware, however, that Web pages present additional evaluation challenges.

Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the author? Is the author's name clearly visible? Is there a link to the author's e-mail address? • What are the author's qualifications, education, occupation? • Has the author written articles or books other than web pages? • Is there a link to additional information about the author? A personal homepage? A biography or curriculum vita? Can you verify this information? • Is the source peer-reviewed or edited? If so, by whom? • Does the author belong to an organization? If the page is authored by an organization, what additional information about that organization is available? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check the Library Catalog or WorldCat or metaLINK for journal article databases for books or articles written by or about the author. 2. Search for the author's name in a web search engine (Google, Alta-Vista) using " " around the name. For example: "John Smith". 3. Check the domain name that is embedded in the URL (Uniform Resource Locator = the web address): .gov, .edu, .com, .org, .net, .mil. Sub-domains in the URL may give clues to the source of the file. Examples include: .k-12, .fr, .uk, .ac, .cc, .ny. 4. Use Whois, a database of domain name registrations from Internic.net to find out who has registered the domain name of the URL. 5. Search for the main web site address in alltheweb or Google. Both find pages that link to the URL, are similar to the URL, and contain other information about the URL. 6. Check the international country codes at Netlingo <p>Examples: Asia-Pacific Research Online Dihydrogen Monoxide Colorq</p>
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there clues to tell you that the information on the page is true? • Does the author list sources? Is there a bibliography of citations on the page to show where the data is coming from? • Can the information be verified elsewhere? Perhaps in a print source? • Are there obvious errors (spelling, grammar, etc.)? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch groups scan the web for mis-information, fraudulent, and fanatical web sites. Virtual Chase maintains an updated list of these groups. <p>Examples: OncoLink NordiCaLite The King Center</p>

Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the page reflect a particular bias or viewpoint? Does the author use inflammatory or provocative language? • What is the purpose of the page? Why was this page written and for whom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ To inform? To sell/market a product or idea? To entertain? To persuade? • Remember, the web can be a "soapbox" for organizations or people. • Is there advertising on the page? If there is advertising, can it be differentiated from the informational content? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Widener University gives checklists to identify different kinds of web pages (advocacy, business/marketing, informational, news, personal). 2. Find and read the web site's Statement of Purpose, Mission Statement, or About Us link. <p>Examples: Consumer Reports Online Martin Luther King U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum</p>
Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was the page first published and last updated? • If the page was revised, were the changes substantive? • Is the information on the page current or outdated? • When was the information gathered? • Are the links current or are there any dead links on the page? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always note and cite the date you visited the web page. You may have to prove the validity of your data from another source if your page disappears. <p>Examples: CNN Catholic Encyclopedia Breast Cancer Statistics</p>
Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the page a complete document or an abstract/summary? • Does the author adequately cover the topic? Is important information left out intentionally? What time period is covered? • Are there good links to additional coverage? • Is the information free or is there a fee to access more detailed data? • Does the page contain information that is pertinent to your research topic? How can you use this information? <p>Examples: Gun Control LANIC Depression</p>
Design & Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the page easy to read? Does the background interfere with the page's content? Is the color "easy on the eyes"? • Is the material presented in an orderly format? • Do the graphics and images add to the presentation of the page? • Are links appropriate to the topic of the page? Do they work? • Is there a link at the bottom of the page to go back to the top of the page? • Is there a link on each supporting page to go back to the main page? • Is there a comment link at the bottom of the main page? • Do you need special software to view the information? Is there a fee to obtain the information? If you don't have the software, how much information are you missing?

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<http://library.lib.binghamton.edu/search/evaluation.html>

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