

Evaluating Web Resources

Currency

Authority

Reliability

Purpose

Coverage

Style and Functionality

The Internet continues to grow daily in part because anyone with access to the right equipment can create a Web page. These Web pages are rarely filtered, often making it difficult to determine the content's accuracy. For these reasons, it is essential to review each page carefully before using it for research purposes. The following guidelines may be useful in evaluating Web resources.

Currency

Like classic literature, some work is ageless, while other work, like technological news, is outdated very rapidly. It is important, therefore, to determine when the information was created and if it is still of worth.

When was the site originally mounted on the Web?

When was the site last updated or revised? If you cannot find a date on the page, click on Page Info under the View menu.

How often is the site updated?

Do the links on the site work or are they dead links?

Authority

Determining the author or source of information for a Web site is important in deciding whether information has credibility. The author should show some evidence of being knowledgeable, reliable, and truthful.

Is the author identifiable? Look for links that say "Who We Are," "About This Site," or something similar.

Is there contact information for the author? (e.g. e-mail address, mailing address or phone number)

What is the author's background? (e.g. experience, credentials, occupation, have they written other publications on the topic?)

Does the author cite his or her sources?

Is this site linked to often by other sites?

Do links on this site lead to other reputable sites?

Are there spelling errors or incorrect use of grammar?

What **domain** does the site belong to? (e.g. **edu**, **gov**, **com**, etc.)?

Reliability

The dependability of a Web site is important if it is going to be cited as a source in other works or recommended for use by others.

Do most of the links on the page work?

From your evaluation of currency and authority, do you think the site will be there next time you visit it?

Purpose

Occasionally, Web sites pretending to be objective have a hidden agenda and may be trying to persuade, promote, or sell something.

What is the purpose or motive for the site? (e.g. educational, commercial, entertainment, promotional, etc.)

Is the site trying to sell you something?

How easy is it to differentiate advertisement from content?

Based on your knowledge, is the information factual, opinion, propaganda?

Who is the intended audience and how is this reflected in the organization and presentation of the site?

Coverage

While not all Web sites claim to be comprehensive, with some only covering specific aspects of an issue or topic, it is important to look at the depth of coverage to determine whether facts have been deliberately omitted.

Does the site cover a specific time period or aspect of the topic or does it cover the topic in depth?

What information is included? Omitted?

Is the page completed or "under construction"?

Style and Functionality

Evaluating Web sites for style and functionality may not be a concern once you have determined the site is authoritative. However, if the information on the site is going to be shared with others, the design may become more important.

Is the site professional looking and well designed?

Is the site well organized?

Does the background enhance the site?

Can you easily read the text?

Are images used to enhance, rather than to impress?

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