The Web as a Research Tool: Evaluation Criteria

The Internet is a wonderful source of research and entertainment - the problem lies in separating the two. The quality of sources varies tremendously, and since the Internet is not governed, there is no built-in quality control. Here are some criteria to help you evaluate Web resources.

1. IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF WEB SITE

   Is It?
   - Entertainment
   - Business/Commercial
   - Reference/Informational
   - News
   - Advocacy
   - Personal Page

   Common URLs ending with:
   - .com Business/Commercial
   - .edu Educational Institution
   - .mil Military
   - .net Various Types of Networks
   - .org Nonprofit Organization

   AUTHORITY/AUTHOR

   a. Who is the "author"? Is it clear what sponsoring body (organization, etc.) or individual is responsible for the site?
   b. Does the "author" provide e-mail or a contact address/telephone number?
   c. Can you verify if the site is "official," actually sponsored/sanctioned by an organization or company?
   d. What are the "author's" qualifications/credentials?
   e. Is there a way to verify the legitimacy of this organization/company or individual?

3. ACCURACY

   a. Are the sources for factual information listed so they can be verified in another source?
   b. How does this information compare with other sources of information on this topic?
   c. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling and other typographical errors?

4. OBJECTIVITY

   a. Where is the document published? Check the URL domain (.edu, .com, .mil, .gov, .net).
   b. Has the author or organization clearly stated the goals and/or aims of the site?
   c. Is there a clear distinction between advertising, opinion, and factual information?
   d. For a business/commercial site, is it clear what the company's motivation is?
   e. For a personal home page or organization, are any biases or points of view clearly stated or implied?
5. CURRENCY

a. Are there any dates on the page to indicate the following?

- when the site was developed
- the day of the last update
- how often it is updated

b. How current are the links? Are there any dead links on the page?

c. Is any of the information on the page outdated?

6. CONTENT

a. Does the page meet your research needs or purpose?

b. Is there an indication that the site is complete and not still under construction?

c. If there is a print equivalent, is it clear if the web version is more or less extensive than the print?

d. Is the subject adequately covered?

e. If other sources are quoted, is the information accurately cited?

---

For More Information, see:
"Evaluating Web Pages" (a tutorial module developed by the UC Berkeley Library)
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html

Questions and comments can be addressed to: Patricia Mardeusz. Bailey/Howe Library Information & Instruction Services.  Last updated: September 14, 2012