

Doing Research on the Web: Evaluating Web Sites

Anybody can publish anything on the Web. Information does not have to be true to be on the Web and so it is up to users to judge whether information is reliable. Consider the following items to help you judge the reliability and usefulness of information from the Web.

Who is responsible for the Web site?

- ~ If an organization is sponsoring the site, consider the organization's reputation.
- ~ Is a personal author named? If so, what are the author's credentials? Check the site for information *about* the organization and/or author. If no credentials are listed on the site, use a search engine to look for information about the author's credentials.

What kind of organization is responsible for the site?

The last few letters at the end of the URL (Uniform Resource Locator or Web address) give you clues about the type of organization sponsoring the site. These abbreviations fall into two categories country codes and generic domains. Below are several examples:

Country Codes:

- ~ **.ca** – Canada
- ~ **.jp** – Japan
- ~ **.us** – United States
- ~ **.uk** – United Kingdom

Generic Domains:

- ~ **.com** – commercial
- ~ **.edu** – educational (mostly U.S.A.)
- ~ **.gov** – U.S. government
- ~ **.org** – non-profit organization

Be aware that a **.com** Web site may try to sell or promote a product; a **.org** Web site may try to promote an idea or cause. Governments (**.gov**) are generally reliable sources of information. Educational sites (**.edu**) may include student-created pages as well as more scholarly information.

When was the document created?

When was it last updated? Be wary of using Web information that has no date, or has not been updated for several years.

Is the information accurate?

When judging the site's content, consider the following:

- ~ Are there obvious spelling and grammatical errors?
- ~ Are references listed giving the sources of factual information?
- ~ Is the content free of bias and stereotyping?
- ~ Are all of the important topics covered for this subject area?

If in doubt, verify the site's factual information in another source (book, article or Web).

Additional Sources to Evaluate Web sites

- ~ Critical Evaluation of Resources on the Internet – <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/criticalevaluation/index.cfm>
- ~ Evaluating Web Resources Checklist (University of Alberta) – <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/instruction/science/evalweb.pdf>
- ~ Searchpath – <http://www.wmich.edu/library/searchpath/> (an interactive tutorial that covers many aspects of research – including Web searching and evaluation)

References

Alexander, J., & Tate, M. (2000, July 21). *Evaluating Web resources* . Retrieved February 23, 2001, from <http://www2.widener.edu/Wolfgram-Memorial-Library/webevaluation/webeval.htm>

Westera, G. (2001, December 12). *Viewing results and evaluating quality* . Retrieved February 11, 2002, from Curtin University of Technology Web site: <http://lisweb.curtin.edu.au/staff/personal/gwpersonal/searchtut/eval.html>