



Critically evaluating Web sites

Generally, information published in journals, magazines and newspapers is considered more reliable than that found on the World Wide Web. Most Web pages do not go through any editorial review process nor do they give any indication of where information for the content was obtained. However, the Web has a tremendous amount of useful, current and quality information that cannot be found easily elsewhere. Here are some guidelines for critical evaluation of Web sites.

Questions to ask	What to look at	Implications
<p>Who is responsible for the site?</p> <p>Who wrote the page?</p> <p>Contact information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the URL carefully, it tells you the nature of the site. Personal pages often contain the name of the web page owner. • The domain name sometimes indicates the origin of the site: .gov – only U.S government .us – any U.S. citizen or U.S. business .edu – only educational institutions .org – any organization or group, including a for-profit business, unincorporated group of people, or any individual .com / .net – commercial, anyone • Look for the name of the author, agency or organization that claims responsibility for the page. 	<p>Authority & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government, educational and well-known non-profit organizations usually provide information that is more reliable. • Only .gov & .edu pages cannot be purchased by just anyone. Most other domains are publicly available to individuals or organizations. • Commercial or personal pages are not necessarily unreliable, but you have to be more careful and critical when using their information. • Author information allows you to assess the credentials and authority of the author; a web page without the name of the author or agency is questionable. • An anonymous site usually is not a reliable source. • Anonymous sites usually include no contact information other than an e-mail address.
<p>What is the purpose of the web page?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at “About” or other links on the site to determine the purpose of the web page. • Check to see if there are “related links,” “additional sites,” or further references. 	<p>Content – reliability & accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the web page shows the intention or position of the author; you can determine whether the page is for giving information, persuading, selling or achieving a certain purpose.

<p>Is the page someone's opinion? Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious or personal biases?</p> <p>Is the text well-written without spelling and grammatical mistakes?</p> <p>Are sources documented with footnotes or links?</p> <p>What is the overall quality of the web page?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the sites that the page links out to for a better idea of any bias. • Look for spelling or grammatical mistakes. • Check to see if the sources of information are documented. • Look at the copyright information of permissions to reproduce. • Check out the links on the web page. Do they work? • Look at the content presentation, writing style, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pages with links that offer opposing viewpoints are more likely to be unbiased. • Well-written / scholarly work should not have spelling and grammatical mistakes. • Scholarly work and reliable information usually have footnotes and/or documentation of information sources and copyright information. • Well-chosen and well-organized links indicate quality of the page. • Dead links are signs of a poorly maintained page. • A high quality web page is characterized by logical presentation and good writing style.
<p>Is the page current?</p> <p>When was the last update?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the Last Update information. • Check the date of the document. 	<p>Timeliness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The date of the last update tells you whether the author is still maintaining the page. • For some topics, the currency of information is important; dated information will not be useful. • Do not use undated statistical information.
<p>Does the information relate to your topic?</p> <p>Is the information at an appropriate level?</p> <p>Are there better sources available in the library?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your instructor's requirement for the research paper. • Decide whether the information is too advanced or too elementary for your topic. • Is the source appropriate for a research paper? 	<p>Relevance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For research papers, use scholarly, professional publications in print and electronic formats (research databases) provided by the library. • If you decide to use Internet resources, make sure your instructor approves Web resources and evaluate the sources critically before you use them.