



Library Learning Commons

Web Site Evaluation

The World Wide Web is great for checking the news, looking for telephone numbers, finding a last minute deal on eBay and because anyone can host their own web site, to express their own opinions. Such attributes at your fingertips are also what make the Web problematic when conducting research for a paper or project for class. The Web should be used as a way to enhance your research, for much of the information that you will find may be unreliable, inaccurate or out of date – information you should not use.

Broad topics such as diabetes or stem cell research may yield hundreds to thousands of Web pages through a search engine, many of which could have little or nothing to do with your specific topic. Searching for a controversial topic such as abortion or gay marriage will also pose a problem because of the range of viewpoints with questionable authority found throughout the Web and the bias that a single site may contain. Searching for specific information may produce few useful pages to read or you may find that you will have to pay for the information due to copyright issues.

If you decide to venture out into the Web for resources for your research, you should understand the criteria used to analyze Web sites so that you are using sites that are both informative and credible. Before you chose a site from a list retrieved by a search engine, take a look at the domain name suffix found at the end of the Web address. Often, those ending with .edu (education), .gov (for the U.S. government) or .org (organization) may be found to be more reliable than sites that end in .com, which indicates a commercial site.

Once you choose a site, use these four essential criteria for evaluating information sources:

Authority:

- Who is the author?
- Is the author listed?
- Are the author's qualifications to write on the subject given?
- Is the site sponsored by a particular organization?

Accuracy

- Can the information be verified?
- Can you verify statistics?
- Does the author cite other works?
- Are there spelling and grammar mistakes?

Objectivity

- Whose side are they on?
- Is there a sponsor for this site?
- Are inflammatory words used to influence your ideas?
- If there is an "About Us" link, does it tell you the aim of the Web site directly?

Currency

- How old is the information?
- Does the site have a copyright date?
- Is the site updated frequently?
- Are there any dead links?