

### EVALUATING INFORMATION FOUND ON THE INTERNET

The Internet has captured everyone's attention. It is usually quick and easy to use, is entertaining, and appears to contain facts or opinions on just about anything imaginable. One reason for the Internet's popularity is that it is unfiltered or uncensored. Anyone with the proper hardware and software can publish information for all to read and view. Though this is in many ways wonderful, the structure of the Internet also means that you, as the information seeker, have the added responsibility to determine if information on the web is balanced, valid, and useful.

Evaluating information found on the Internet can begin as soon as you start browsing the results of a search engine query. For example, from the search results page you can view the web address and publication date, which can help you draw conclusions about the author's affiliation and when the site was composed. Once you arrive at the site, quickly check whether the author's name is stated and if any biographical information is given. At this point begin to analyze the content and the usefulness of the web site.

#### WEBSITE EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The following checklist is offered as a general guide for evaluating websites. The list is meant to be only suggestive, not formulaic. As you develop your expertise, you will begin to develop your own evaluation methods.

##### 1. The Subject Matter

- What is the website about?
- How will the site's information enhance your project or your awareness of the topic?

##### 2. The Purpose

- What is the website/webpage designed to do? (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to critique, to entertain, to sell)
- Who is the author and what is her/his aim? (Look for links like "About Us," "Mission," and "Purpose.")
- Who is the intended audience? (e.g., experts, novices, children, adults, members of an organization)

##### 3. The Contents

- Is the information emotionally charged or balanced? Are ideas based on facts or on opinions? Are multiple points of view presented and discussed?
- Can the information be verified by other sources?
- Is the information valid and well researched?
- Are the assumptions reasonable?
- Do you find errors or omissions in information?
- Is the argument clear and consistent?
- Does the site include relevant secondary materials and sound documentation?

#### **4. The Authority**

- Are the author's name and the creation date included on the page? If so, what are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations?
- Who/what is the publisher, source, and/or sponsor?
- Does the web address (i.e., domain name) provide any clues about the author's affiliation? (e.g., an organization (.org), a company (.com), an educational institution (.edu), the military (.mil), or perhaps the government (.gov)
- Do the pages reflect an institution's point of view, or are they the views of an individual?

#### **5. Currency**

- When was the page published or copyrighted?
- When was the page last updated?
- When was the information gathered? (e.g., graphs, charts, research)
- If the page uses references, how recent are those sources?
- Are the links functional?

#### **6. The Writing Style and Format**

- Is the page logically organized?
- Are the main points clearly presented?
- Is the text easy to read?
- Are there illustrations and/or figures (e.g., tables, graphs) that help explain or complement the text?

#### **7. The Significance of the Work**

- Does the web page present information not easily found on other web sites or in traditional formats?
- Is the Internet the best place to find what you need? Or is it only a starting point for your project? Are print sources or other electronic sources more appropriate?

If you would like assistance with evaluating information, please speak with a reference librarian or your instructor.