

EVALUATING INFORMATIONAL SOURCES

This guide provides strategies and tools to assist you in evaluating the sources you use for your research (especially websites). When evaluating a source you should determine its **quality**, **value** and **reliability**. The criteria for evaluating print and electronic sources are somewhat similar but the content published on websites requires additional care on your part. Here are a few criteria you should be looking at when selecting a source:

Authority

- Who published the document and is it separate from the webmaster (the creator of the website)?
- What are the author's credentials, qualifications, background, institutional affiliations or other publications? Look for the **About Us** section.
- Does the other have obvious biases?
- Check how many sites are linked to the site you are researching. Use link:site URL in Google. Ex. Link <http://www.pewinternet.org>
- Check the domain of the document, what institution publishes this document?
 - .edu educational institutions (excl. to US colleges and universities)
 - .gov government entities and agencies
 - .org usually for non-profit organizations
 - .com may be used by all (75% of sites)

Usually **.edu** and **.gov** provides reliable information but may contain errors too.

Be careful with **.com** and **.org** addresses.

<http://www.whois.net> allows you to check the owner(s) of a website. You can then "google" that name to verify credentials.

ACCURACY

- Who wrote the page and can you contact him or her? (Make sure that the author provides e-mail or a contact address/phone number)
- What is the purpose of the document and why was it produced?

OBJECTIVITY

- Determine if the page is a mask for advertising; if so, information might be biased. Be aware that some blogs might be sponsored by a commercial entity.
- How detailed is the information?
- What opinion is expressed by the author?
- Does it give the whole story about this topic?
- If the information seems accurate but biased, you should consider searching for an opposite viewpoint.

CURRENCY

- When was it produced?
- When was it updated? Look for the **Last updated** info, usually at the bottom of the home page.
- How up-to-date are the links? Try a few to see if they work.

PRESENTATION

- Is the research well organized?
- Does it have a good bibliography?
- Do the design, organization, navigation and overall look of the site indicate a professional effort?
- Does the site support an archive and provide an effective search engine to locate and access all the content?

Bibliography:

Kapoun, Jim. "Five Criteria for Evaluating Web Pages." *Olin and Uris Libraries, Cornell University*. Cornell University, 10 05 2010. Web. 17 Mar 2011. <<http://www.library.cornell.edu.olinuris/ref/research/webcrit.html>>.

Pacifici, Sabrina I. "Getting It Right : Verifying Sources on the Net." *LLRX*. LLRX, 2011. Web. 17 Mar 2011. <<http://llrx.com/features/verifying.htm>>.