

EVALUATING INFORMATION FOUND ON THE INTERNET

The Internet has captured everyone's attention. It is usually quick and easy to use, entertaining, and appears to contain facts or opinions on just about anything imaginable. One reason for its popularity contents is because it is unfiltered or not censored. Because of its structure, anyone with the proper hardware and software programs can display whatever is desired for all to read and view. Though it sounds wonderful, you, as the information seeker, are given the added responsibility for determining if the information or argument is balanced, valid, and useful.

Evaluating information found on the Internet can begin when you start browsing the results of a query made to a search engine or directory. By looking at the address and date you can begin to draw conclusions about the author's affiliation and when the sited was composed. Once you arrive at the site you can quickly check to see if the author's name is stated and if any biographical information is given. At this point you begin to analyze the content and the usefulness of the web site. The following checklist is meant to be only suggestive. As you develop your expertise, you will begin to formulate your own evaluation methods.

CONTENTS OF THE SITE

1. The Subject Matter

What is it? How will the information enhance your project or your awareness?

2. The Purpose

What did the author hope to accomplish?

Is the web page designed to inform, to persuade, to critique, etc. the subject matter?

Who is the intended audience? Experts, novices, children, adults, members of an organization, etc.

3. The Contents

Is the information emotionally charged or balanced, based on facts or opinions, or is it propaganda?

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?

Is the author's point of view impartial, objective or valid?

What is strength and consistency of argument?

Does the site include relevant secondary materials and sound documentation?

Is the Internet only a starting point for your project? Are print sources or other electronic sources more appropriate?

4. The Authority

What are the author's background, qualifications and perspective?

Does the address provide any clues about the author's affiliation with an organization (.org), or a company (.com), or an educational institution (.edu), or the military (mil), or perhaps a position with 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 composed?

Does it need to be updated?

6. The Writing Style and Format

Is the page logically organized?

Are the main points clearly presented?

Do you find the text easy to read?

Are there tables, graphs, etc. that help explain or compliment the text? Is the author's name and date created included on the page?

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?

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