Evaluating Internet Resources

Georgetown University Library – Internet resources (www.library.geogretown.edu/internet/eval.htm)

Unlike similar information found in newspapers or television broadcasts, information available on the Internet is not regulated for quality or accuracy; therefore, it is particularly important for the individual Internet user to evaluate the resource or information. Keep in mind that almost anyone can publish anything they wish on the Web. It is often difficult to determine authorship of Web sources, and even if the author is listed, he or she may not always represent him or herself honestly, or he or she may represent opinions as fact. The responsibility is on the user to evaluate resources effectively.

I. Test Your Evaluation Skills - Ask yourself these questions before using resources from the World Wide Web:

A. Author
1. Is the name of the author/creator on the page?
2. Are his/her credentials listed? (occupation, years of experience, position or education)
3. Is the author qualified to write on the given topic? Why?
4. Is there contact information, such as an e-mail address, somewhere on the page?
5. Is there a link to a homepage?
6. If there is a link to a homepage, is it for an individual or for an organization?
7. If the author is with an organization, does it appear to support or sponsor the page?
8. What does the domain name/URL reveal about the source of the information, if anything?
9. If the owner is not identified, what can you tell about the origin of the site from the address?

B. Purpose - Knowing the motive behind the page's creation can help you judge its content.
1. Who is the intended audience?
2. What does the site attempt to do?
3. If not stated, what do you think is the purpose of the site? Is the purpose to:

C. Objectivity
1. Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda?
2. Is the author's point-of-view objective and impartial?
3. Is the language free of emotion-rousing words and bias?
4. Is the author affiliated with an organization?
5. Does the author's affiliation with an institution or organization appear to bias the information?
6. Does the content of the page have the official approval of the institution, organization, or company?

D. Accuracy
1. Are the sources for factual information clearly listed so that the information can be verified?
2. Is it clear who has the ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the content of the material?
3. Can you verify any of the information in independent sources or from your own knowledge?
4. Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
5. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors?

E. Reliability and Credibility
1. Why should anyone believe information from this site?
2. Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it unsupported by evidence?
3. Are quotes and other strong assertions backed by sources that you could check through other means?
4. What institution (company, government, university, etc.) supports this information?
5. If it is an institution, have you heard of it before? Can you find more information about it?
6. Is there a non-Web equivalent of this material that would provide a way of verifying its legitimacy?

F. Currency
1. If the information is of a current nature, is it kept up-to-date?
2. Is there an indication of when the site was last updated?

G. Links
1. Are links related to the topic and useful to the purpose of the site?
2. Are links still current, or have they become dead ends?
3. What kinds of sources are linked?
4. Are the links evaluated or annotated in any way?

II. Test your evaluation skills using the checklist above. Which of these sites are legitimate sources of information?

1) Feline Reactions to Bearded Men - http://www.improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.htmll

2) Dihydrogen Monoxide - http://www.dhmo.org/

3) The True but Little Known Facts about Women and Aids, with documentation -
   http://147.129.1.10/library/research/AIDSFACTS.htm

4) Secondhand Smoke: The Big Lie - http://www.jeremiahproject.com/smoke/corrupt.html

5) OncoLink - http://oncolink.upenn.edu

6) Human Rights Watch, World Report 1999 on Tunisia -
   http://www.hrw.org/hrw/worldreport99/mideast/tunisia.html

7) Efforts by Tunisian government in the cause of Human Rights - http://www.rights-tunisia.org/

Conclusion: Be very critical of any information you find on the Web and carefully examine each site. Web pages are susceptible to both accidental and deliberate alteration, and may move or disappear with no notice. Print out or download all pages you plan to use in your research so that your bibliography will be complete and accurate. Are you sure the Web is where you want to be? It may take an hour to find the answer to a question on the Web that would take a Reference Librarian two minutes to find. When in doubt, ask a Librarian!

Additional Information on Evaluating Internet Resources:
Hoax? Scholarly Research? Personal Opinion? You Decide! Created by Esther Grassian and Diane Zwemer at the UCLA College Library.
Evaluating Web Pages by J. Alexander and M. Tate, Wolfgram Memorial Library, Widener University, July 1996.
Netlore: Rumors, Hoaxes & Urban Legends from About.com