

EVALUATING WEB INFORMATION

<http://www.lib.vt.edu/research/evaluate/evaluating.html>

Information comes to us from a wide variety of sources. Can you tell good information from bad? For extensive resources on evaluating web information, go to "Bibliography on Evaluating Web Information" <<http://www.lib.vt.edu/research/evaluate/evalbiblio.html>>

Search Engine Watch < <http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/article.php/2156481>> estimates that there are over 6 BILLION Web sites out there and that Web search engines cover less than 1/4 of that! (What percent of this do you think will be QUALITY, USEFUL information?)

Here are some things to remember when you use the Web:

- ANYONE can publish on the Web! Will you be able to distinguish between John Hopkins the 7th grader and Johns Hopkins University?
- Most of the Libraries' subscription-based periodical databases are available from the Libraries' web site and can be accessed from your dorm room. You can bet that there will be a much higher percentage of useful information from these resources than from the Web. This is mainly because most articles must be critiqued and evaluated by scholars and editors before publication which ensures that the information you receive is accurate and useful. Scholarly articles are rarely available for free on the Web.

EVALUATION OF INFORMATION AND SOURCES: RELIABILITY AND CREDIBILITY

<<http://www.lib.purdue.edu/itd/techman/eval.html>>

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The outline below* lists areas to check when evaluating information found on the Internet.

WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

- Is she/he qualified to write this "article?"
- What is her/his occupation, position, education, experience?
- What are her/his credentials?

ARE THE FACTS ACCURATE?

- How does this information compare with that in other sources in the field?

PERSPECTIVE

- Does the author have a bias?
- Does she/he express a particular point of view?
- Is the author affiliated with particular organizations, institutions, associations?

DOES THE FORUM IN WHICH THE INFORMATION APPEARS HAVE A BIAS?

- Is it directed toward a specific audience? [*General public, scholars in a given field, etc.*]
- Where is the information "published?"
- When was it written?

PURPOSE

- To what audience is the author writing?
- Is this reflected in the writing style, vocabulary, or tone?
- Does the material inform? explain? persuade?
- Is there sufficient evidence?
- What conclusions are drawn?

WHERE TO CHECK...

- Source – moderated/unmoderated list? anonymous ftp site?
- check online directory sources for affiliations, bio info
- scrutinize the "header" information to determine author
- compare to other sources (similar & different)
- check archives of online lists for other "works" by author
- check reviews of online lists for scope, purpose
- determine if it is appropriate for your needs

Resources, such as Web search engines, also need to be reviewed and evaluated. Many of the criteria listed above apply in the same way.

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- *Adapted in part from: The Savvy Student's Guide to Library Research. Judy Pask, Roberta Kramer, Scott Mandernack. Purdue University Undergraduate Library: W. Lafayette, IN. 1993 (No longer in print...)*
 - *Originally published 1996. Cosmetic update 2001. Minor nudge, 05/2004.*