Evaluating a Web Site

Are you wondering what characteristics determine whether a web site is reputable? Are you planning to use a web site as a source of reference and need to know if it is acceptable? Would you like to know how to evaluate whether or not the sites you are visiting are legitimate? One way to help protect yourself online is to understand how to critically evaluate a web site and identify potential malicious content.

How to Evaluate a Web Site

A. Introduction to web site evaluation

If you browse the Web often it should be quite apparent that every site is different from the next. Why is any one website “better” than another? What are the basic features that make a good website? Are you evaluating a website for purpose of source material or a citation?

The Internet is full of a variety of different websites: News (New York Times), Sports (ESPN), Health (WebMD), Shopping (Wayfair), and more. But how do you know whether or not the website you are visiting is providing legitimate, or even accurate, information?

B. Look for these components when evaluating a web site:

1. Authority (Source): It is important to identify who is providing the information. Is there a possibility the author has a certain opinion due to financial or other interests? If the author or publisher's name is not in plain view you may find more detailed information in the “About” or “Contact Us” section (typically at the bottom of the page).

2. Accuracy: If the source is questionable, it is always a good idea to verify what you have found by locating the same information from another source.

3. Currency: Is the information up-to-date? This may be dependent on what type of information is being used. Some information is timeless or historical in nature, while other content is vulnerable to change (for example, politics or rapidly changing events in science). Typically, at the bottom of a web site’s page will be more information. Here you should find a copyright date or an “About” section or hyperlink.
Web Site Evaluation

4. **Links:** A good source provides citations for its information as well as links for further reading on the subject.

5. **Domain:** Is the web site linked to a federal agency (.gov), a nonprofit site (.org), an educational institution (.edu), or a business (.com)?

Activity

If you are trying to do research on the Internet, you should have a set of guidelines to help determine if you have come across a good or bad source. Practice evaluating web sites by following the steps below:

1. Choose on one or more of these web sites (or go to a page of your own choosing), find an article or story, and review the key areas listed below.
   - The Onion [http://www.theonion.com]
   - National Geographic [http://www.nationalgeographic.com]
   - Natural News [http://www.naturalnews.com]

2. Look for the page's author or source (Authority).

3. Find some facts or statistics that can be cross-checked (Accuracy).

4. Check to see if the site is up-to-date (Currency).

5. Determine if the content is overly biased (Objectivity).

6. Follow up on any links or resources provided on the page (Links).

7. Keep web site domain types in mind when researching. For example, .com or .edu (Domain).

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Best Practices & Evaluation: [http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/rtrieger/evalwebsites.htm](http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/rtrieger/evalwebsites.htm)

Evaluating Websites: [http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/tbarcalow/490NET/Evaluation.htm - students](http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/tbarcalow/490NET/Evaluation.htm - students)

Evaluating Internet Research Sources: [http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm](http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm)

Web Site Evaluation

Evaluating Web Sources: [http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page346375](http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page346375)

Evaluating Internet Resources: [http://eduscapes.com/tap/topic32.htm](http://eduscapes.com/tap/topic32.htm)
Evaluating Web Sources: [http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page346375](http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page346375)