

How to Help Students Evaluate Sources & Locate Quality Sources on the World Wide Web

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EVALUATE WORLD-WIDE-WEB SOURCES

- Help students understand why quality sources are needed.
- Encourage students to challenge the information they find on the World Wide Web (WWW).
- Help students get in the habit of being skeptical and demanding accountability.

WWW sources should be examined for credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support.

Credibility

- Web page provides the author's name, title, organization, date or version of page, contact information, information about the organization
- Author or organization is an expert in the area
 - ❖ Warning signs: anonymous or pseudonym; author is not an expert in the area; bad grammar or misspelled words

Accuracy

- Evidence of quality control (peer review, reputable organization, information correctly taken from books or journals that have been through a rigorous review process)
- Objective stance taken
- Attempts comprehensive coverage
 - ❖ Warning signs: no date on web page; vague information; one-sided view that does not acknowledge opposing views; no citations or documentation; conflict of interest

Reasonableness

- Tone and language are appropriate
- Other sources corroborate the information
 - ❖ Warning signs: inappropriate tone or language; grand claims or over-blown claims

Support

- Citations, references, or documentation of claims, facts, and statistics
- References are high quality
 - ❖ Warning signs: facts or statistics presented without a citation indicating their source; no documentation for facts presented; unable to find corroboration

Questions to guide evaluation

1. URL

Is the web page on a domain that provides credible information? Is it a well-known or recognizable domain? Can you count on that domain to provide reliable, true information?

Parts of the URL

Type of file (http, ftp)	Domain	Directory(ies)	File name
http://	libweb.hawaii.edu	/uhmlib/libinfo	/libinfo.html
http://	starbulletin.com	/2005/10/24/sports	/story01.html

- Domain suffixes: .com—commercial entity, .edu—education, .gov—U.S. government, .mil—U.S. military, .net—primarily Internet services companies, .org—organization, .us—United States, .uk—United Kingdom.
- Personal web pages or web spaces are typically not credible sources. Some credible domains host personal pages (e.g., geocities.com, msn.com). Clues: a personal name or the words “users,” “members,” or “people” in the URL.
- Blogs, e-mails, forums are typically not credible sources.

2. AUTHOR

Who wrote the web page and what is his/her/their background?

- Look for links such as “About us,” “Biography,” “Mission Statement,” “Philosophy.” [These are typically on the main page; to move to the main page or highest level of the site, truncate the URL so only the domain is listed.]
- Google the author or the organization.
- Use Alexa’s Traffic Rankings <www.alexa.com> to see who visits the site, site traffic, related links, and who links to the site.

3. PURPOSE

What is the purpose of the web page?

- Inform? Persuade? Entertain? Report news? Sell? Educate?
- Parody or satire?
- Clues: words used, tone of language, extraordinary claims.

4. AUDIENCE

For whom was the web page written?

- A knowledgeable audience? A group of specialists? A consumer?
- Is the content at an appropriate level for the student and his or her purpose?

5. TIMELINESS

When was the page written or last updated?

- Is the timeliness of the information appropriate for the student’s project?

6. DOCUMENTATION

What documentation or citations are given?

- Is there a list of references? Are the references of high quality?
- Is there a list of links that appear to be good sources?

7. CORROBORATION

How does the content compare with other sources?

- Caution: because plagiarism is rampant on the WWW, finding corroborating information on the WWW may not signal that the information is accurate.

LOCATE QUALITY WORLD-WIDE-WEB SOURCES

1. Use Google or another search engine to locate known authorities on the topic
Tip: provide students with a list of experts and reputable organizations or businesses
2. Use a subject directory
 - a. Librarians’ Index <lii.org>
 - b. Infomine <infomine.ucr.edu>
 - c. Academic Info <academicinfo.net>
 - d. Google Directory <google.com/dirhp>
 - e. Yahoo! Directory <dir.yahoo.com>
3. Use a search engine that is designed to find articles
 - a. Google Scholar <scholar.google.com>
 - b. LookSmart’s Find Articles <findarticles.com>
4. Skip the open World Wide Web and use the Internet to search the restricted databases provided by Hamilton Library