

EVALUATING WEB PAGES FOR USE IN RESEARCH



The World Wide Web has become an invaluable resource for quick access to information. In some instances, the material on a website can be useful in a research project, but unfortunately, the vast amount of information on the web is not research quality. In many cases the information is simply opinion, in others it is bias or sometimes even advertising. The following is a list of questions and a checklist of things to consider when evaluating information on a particular website for suitability as a legitimate research source.

Questions	Checklist
<p>Accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who wrote the page? • Can you contact the author? • When was the site created? • When was the information last updated? • Are the links current and relevant? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the author provides an email address and/or a contact address and phone number. • Remember the distinction between an author (the one who wrote the information) and webmaster (the one who posted the information). • Check for the date of creation and updates. • Check that the links are current and correct.
<p>Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who published the information or what institution sponsored the page? • Do the authors list their qualifications? • Are all sources identified and cited correctly? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine who is disseminating the information. • Check the URL domain (.edu, .gov, .org, etc.). • Look for the authors' credentials. • Look for a complete, up-to-date bibliography.
<p>Objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of the document? • Who is the intended audience? • What goals/objectives does the page meet? • What opinions (if any) are expressed by the author? • How detailed is the information? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself, "Why was this written and for whom?" • Determine whether the page is stating opinion, if it is a mask for advertising, or if it is biased. • Check whether claims are supported by facts and/or data. • Again, look for a complete, up-to-date bibliography.

Putting it all together:

- If the web page lists the author and institution that published the page and provides a way of contacting them, and...
- If the page is current and updated regularly (as stated on the page), and the links are accurate, and...
- If the URL domain is appropriate (.edu, .gov, .org, .net) and the page notes the sponsor, lists the author's credentials, and provides a bibliography, and...
- If the page provides accurate information with limited advertising, and it is objective in presenting the information, then...

You may have a quality web page that could be of value to your research!