

Evaluating what we read, see, and hear is not a new challenge. It's something we should all be doing with any information and ideas we encounter, including what we find on the Web.

The ease of Web publishing is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it gives us a wonderful array of material. On the other hand, the quality of this material is totally unpredictable.

It's very difficult for non-experts to assess the reliability of information, and we are all non-experts in most things. Just for a moment, though, focus on an area of interest in which you are something of an expert. In this area you have a foundation of knowledge that helps you critique new material. For example, if you are a tennis aficionado, you might notice factual errors in a Web document on Wimbledon. You might recognize the document's bias and be able to challenge something it says.

So what can you do about evaluating material in all those areas about which you know very little? You can develop a questioning mindset about the material and its source.

The next section will describe four criteria you can use to evaluate a web resource.

## Criteria for Evaluating Web Resources

1. Authority
2. Purpose
3. Accuracy
4. Currency

### Authority

Ask yourself

- Who is the author of this document?
- What expertise, or credentials, does the author or group have?

Tips

- Look for the author's name near the top or the bottom of the page. If you can't find a name, look for a name of a publishing or sponsoring organization.
- Look for biographical information or the author's affiliations (university department, organization, corporate title, etc.)
- Look for contact information for the author or organization
- To verify a site's organizational sponsorship:
  - Look at the domain (.com, .edu, .org, etc.)
  - Look for an 'about this site' link

### Purpose

Ask yourself

- Why was this document created and published?
- Who is the target audience?
- Is there a bias?

Tips

- The purpose of the page could be advertising, advocacy, news, entertainment, opinion, scholarship, etc.
- Look at the reading level to identify target audience. Possible audiences include: academic researchers, kids, college students, members of an organization, professionals, the general public, etc.
- Is a point of view directly expressed? Does the author acknowledge opposing points of view?

## Accuracy

Ask yourself

- Are statistics and facts given, and are there references that indicate where they come from?
- Is the information consistent with what you find on other sites or in other readings (e.g., textbooks, articles)?
- Is there a works cited list?
- Are the claims plausible? Read the text carefully.

Tips

- Look at the end of the document or in its text for references to sources the author used; check out some of these sources yourself
- Think of (or ask a librarian to recommend) other sources that might verify the same facts

## Currency

Ask yourself

- When was the page or website last updated?
- Is the information up-to-date?

Tips

- A copyright date (@) can tell you that a site is active but it doesn't really indicate when content on an individual page was mounted or updated.
- Look for a 'What's New' page or recent press releases – these indicate the site is active.
- Try a few links provided on a site to see if they still work. Dead links indicate the site is not being maintained.

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## For Practice

Work through the interactive tutorial on the library website "*Evaluating Web Resources*". Some instructors are assigning the module to their students, but you are welcome to sign up on your own.

Go to the Library website <http://www.langara.bc.ca/library/>. Click on **Library Instruction** under "Help". Then click on **Evaluating Web Resources**. Follow directions to login to the tutorial.

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## For Help with Citing Web Resources

Go to the Library website: <http://www.langara.bc.ca/library/>

- Click on **Citing Your Sources** for guides to various citing styles, which include citing web resources.
- Or, click on **Ask a Librarian** for help.