

## Evaluating Web Pages

Before using information found on a web page for your research project, consider the following criteria to evaluate its credibility.

- Authority
- Purpose/Intended Audience
- Currency
- Objectivity
- Support

### Authority

#### *Criteria & Questions to Consider*

- Who wrote the page?
- What are the author's credentials?
- Can you verify the author's credentials?
- Could the credentials be made up?
- Did the author include contact information?
- Whose web site is this?
- What organization is sponsoring the web page?

#### *Tips & Ideas*

- 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 copyright credit (©) or link to an organization.
- Look for biographical information or the author's affiliations (university department, organization, corporate title, etc.).
- Anyone who has visited a chat room knows that people don't always identify themselves accurately.
- Look for an email link, address, or phone number for the author. A responsible author should give you the means to contact him/her.
- To verify a site's organizational sponsorship:
  - Look at the domain (.com, .edu, .org, etc.).
  - Look for an "about this site" link.
  - Be careful of a web page that has a tilde (~) in the URL, as this usually identifies a personal directory on a web site.

## Purpose/Intended Audience

### *Criteria & Questions to Consider*

- What is the purpose of the page?
- Why did the author create it?
- Who is the target audience?

### *Tips & Ideas*

- The purpose of the page could be advertising, advocacy, news, entertainment, opinion, fandom, scholarship, satire, etc.
- Some pages have more than one purpose. For example, <http://www.dowjones.com/> provides free business information but also encourages you to subscribe to the Wall Street Journal or other Dow Jones products.
- To identify target audience:
  - Look at reading level of the page: is it easy to read or challenging? Does it assume previous knowledge of the subject?
  - Consider the design of the web page: are there banner ads and animated GIFs, or does the page present a lot of text with little decoration?
  - Possible audiences include: academic researchers, kids, buyer's of competitor's products, participants in a support group, political extremists, and more.

## Currency

### *Criteria & Questions to Consider*

- Is there a date at the top or bottom of the page?
- Is the information up-to-date?

### *Tips & Ideas*

- **Note:** A recent date doesn't necessarily mean the information is current. The content might be years out of date even if the date given is recent. (The last update of the page might have been from someone changing an email address or fixing a typo).

- To determine if information is up-to-date, compare the information on the web page to information available through other sources. Broken links are one measure of an out-of-date page.
- In general, information in science, technology, and business fields ages quickly. Information in the humanities and social sciences ages less quickly. In some cases, old information can be perfectly valid.

## Objectivity

### *Criteria & Questions to Consider*

- Is the author being objective or biased?

### *Tips & Ideas*

- Biased information is not necessarily "bad", but you must take the bias into account when interpreting or using the information given.
- Look at the facts the author provides, and the facts the author *doesn't* provide.
- Are the facts accurately and completely cited?
- Is the author fair, balanced, and moderate in his/her views, or is the author overly emotional or extreme?
- Based on the author's authority, try to identify any conflict of interest.
- Determine if the advertising is clearly separated from the objective information on the page.

## Support

### *Criteria & Questions to Consider*

- Does the author support the information he/she uses?
- Is the support respectable?

### *Tips & Ideas*

- Look for links or citations to sources. Some academic web pages include bibliographies.
- Does the page cite well-known sources or authorities?

- Does the page cite a variety of sources? Do other pages on the same topic cite some of the same sources?
- The web page in question should have a mix of internal links (links to web pages on the same site or by the same author) and external links (links to other sources or experts).
- If a web page makes it hard for you to check the support, be suspicious.

(Information found at:

<http://library.duke.edu/services/instruction/libraryguide/evalwebpages.html>)