

Evaluating Web Sites Tutorial transcript

Welcome to GCU's Evaluating Websites Tutorial. Searching the Internet for web pages can be daunting. If you use the Internet for research, how do you know if the results are web sites you can trust? Do any useful guidelines exist to evaluating sites? Where do you begin? Guidelines to use when evaluating websites are: authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, and coverage.

What is authority? The first step is to look for an author on the web page. Who actually wrote this page? (<http://www.guideline.gov>) Is there an author that you can find? You can look for the author on either the top or the bottom of the page. If you can't find an author's name, look for a copyright credit or a link to an organization. Can you verify the author's credentials? Anyone who has visited a chat room knows that people don't always identify themselves accurately. Did the author include contact information? For that you might have to look at the navigation bar and open it up. Look for an e-mail link, address or phone number. Remember, a webmaster is not the author of a site, only the person that formats the information that you see.

What is accuracy? The next step is to check out the facts on the site. Remember, anyone can publish a web page. But, unlike print resources, many web resources do not have editors who check the facts or look for errors. Whose web site is this anyway? Look at the domain; the URL should tell you if it is a .org (which is an organization), .com (which is a commercial site), .edu (which is an educational site). Do you think the information on this site is reliable and error-free? (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>)

What is objectivity? Looking at this site, can you tell what the goals are? Often, the Web serves as a virtual soapbox in which anyone can express his or her opinion on any subject. Chat rooms, blogs, Twitter, are just some of the examples of web pages without clearly stated goals. Do you think this page is objective or biased? (<http://www.ufos-aliens.co.uk/cosmicapollo.html>) Is this page designed to sway your opinion? Can you find advertising on this page? Remember that biased information is not necessarily bad, but you must take the bias into account when interpreting or using the web site. Look for the facts that the author does not provide. Are the facts accurately and completely cited, if at all?

What is currency? Currency refers to the page's accuracy relating to today's events. Is this page dated? (<http://www.china.org.cn/english/OP-e/6035.htm>) If so, when was the last update? How current are the links? Are there any expired or dead links? To decide if the information is up to date, compare the content of this site to other available sources. Broken links tell you how out of date the page is. Sometimes information does change rapidly, and in some cases old information is perfectly valid. How would you rate this page?

What is coverage? What you find on a web page often differs from print coverage on the same topic. Sometimes it is difficult to determine the extent of coverage on a subject when you're looking at a web page. The page may or may not include links to other resources or even references. At other times, web information may just be disinformation—or a hoax, just for fun. Can you tell what the topics are covered on this page? (<http://city-mankato.us/>) Can you tell if the material is in-depth? What does this page offer that nothing else offers? Are there images to balance the page? Can you find cited information on this page?

In conclusion, the library hopes that the above information on evaluating web sites has provided some insight. If you need assistance, please don't hesitate to contact the library. Our phone number is 602-639-6641, or send us an email: library@gcu.edu. We look forward to hearing from you.