

# Guidelines and Criteria for Evaluating Web Pages and Websites

## How do you know if information from a Web page is likely to be accurate and credible?

Publishers and/or editorial boards usually decide if books and periodical articles meet minimum standards of accuracy and credibility that make them worthy enough to be published. However, anyone can create a Web page with no screening at all, so it is extremely important to evaluate information from the Internet.

The questions below should be asked when evaluating any web page. They provide useful guidelines and criteria to help you evaluate the quality and credibility of Web pages.

### 1) Who is the author or organization that created the page or Website?

Responsible Web publications should provide the creator of the information in a readily visible place on the page. Is the author an individual or an organization? Is no author given?

- If an **individual** has written the page and/or site, is biographical information about the author available?
  - What are the author's QUALIFICATIONS or CREDENTIALS? What is his/her/their background in terms of education, experience, occupation, position, affiliation, publications, etc. Do these make him/her/they an expert?
  - Can you discern anything about the CREDIBILITY or REPUTATION of the author?
  - Do a *Google* search of the author's name. Can you find web pages that provide reliable information about the person?
- If an **organization** has authored the page and/or site, is information available about that organization, including its purpose or history?
  - Look for a link such as "Who we are", "About Us", "Philosophy," "Background," etc. on the page or the site's home page.
  - Is it an impartial group (like a university) or a group established to promote an idea or point of view (like the National Rifle Association or a political party)?
  - Do a *Google* search of the organization's name. Can you find web pages that provide reliable information about the organization?

### 2) What is the overall nature and purpose of the page or Website?

- What is the basic purpose of the site? To inform? Explain? Persuade? Market a product? Advocate a cause? Satirize a person, organization, or idea? Are the history, nature, and/or purpose of the page/site described?
- Is the Web page part of a larger website? Look for a link to "HOME" (or the title of the larger website) and click on it. If there's no "home" link, try shortening the URL one subdirectory at a time and pressing <Enter>. This will sometimes bring you to the larger website that your page is part of.
- Identify the type of website. Some possibilities:
  - \*scholarly -- written by researchers or experts in the field
  - \* professional -- written by and primarily for those in a specific profession
  - \* popular -- written for the general public
  - \* advocacy -- promoting particular opinions and causes (includes blogs)
  - \* commercial -- promoting/selling services or products
  - \* entertainment -- strictly for amusement
  - \* news

- \* personal – Facebook, etc.
- \* governmental -- provided by local, state, or federal government

NOTE: Some websites may be a combination of 2 or more of the above. (e.g. [www.howstuffworks.com](http://www.howstuffworks.com))

- Identify the **domain type** within the URL. This is a key factor when evaluating a site since it often indicates the type of site where the information originated. The most common domain types:
  - **.edu**: an educational institution (often reliable, but can be anything from scholarly research to students' personal pages)
  - **.gov**: a government body (usually dependable)
  - **.org**: a non-profit organization (may or may not be biased)
  - **.com**: a commercial enterprise (may be trying to sell or promote a product or service)
  - **.net**: originally for networking organizations, such as internet service providers, but now often used as an alternative to .com

### 3) *What can you discern about the content of the page or Website?*

**Criteria 1: Length and substance of the text:** Does this page provide a substantive, in-depth discussion of the topic, or merely a cursory, superficial overview? Is this a brief “sound-bite,” or a longer, more in-depth analysis?

**Criteria 2: Author’s purpose:** Is this a straightforward summary or overview of the topic, such as you would find in an encyclopedia article? Or is the author presenting a new interpretation, view, or explanation of the topic?

**Criteria 3: Academic quality and reading level of the text:** Is this a serious, complex, detailed, academic treatment of the topic, or is it lighter “popular” discussion geared for the general public?

**Criteria 4: Originality of the text:** Is this original writing, or is it copied and compiled from other sources and websites? Is this primarily a list of links?

**Criteria 5: Objectivity:** Is the text primarily personal opinion rather than an objective discussion? If the text is primarily opinion, is this clearly stated, i.e. is the author clear about the fact that he/she is presenting a subjective view of the topic? Does the author acknowledge that there might be other worthy points of view? Does the site show signs of any political, ideological, cultural, or personal biases? Is the site presenting an extremist or wildly unorthodox view?

**Criteria 6: Sources & Documentation:** Where did the author gather the information presented? Was it from original research, experiments, observation, interviews, books and documents? If lots of factual information is given, does the author cite his/her sources? Verify that the author used authoritative sources to back up his/her arguments and conclusions.

**Criteria 7: Currency:** Is the information or the site itself out of date?

**Criteria 8: Writing style:** Is the content free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors?