

Evaluation of Web Resources

Source: Can you easily identify the creator and publisher of the page? Responsible online publications should give the source of the information in a readily visible place on the page. Be on the lookout for “hidden agendas”. An individual author or web designer of a page (e.g. E.T. Schmoo) could be listed while the source of the information is actually an institution, association or organization.

Credentials: See if you can discover, by looking over the website, what the author’s credentials are. What is his/her background, and why does this make him/her an expert? Is the author affiliated with an institution or group? Is it an impartial group or an advocacy group (like the National Rifle Association)?

Type of information: Is it scholarly (produced by researchers in the field), popular (produced for the general public), governmental, from a private business or association, or basically an advertisement for the author’s product or service? Web pages generally fall into one of these categories: entertainment, educational, business, individual personal pages, or informational.

Purpose: This is related to the previous category. Try to discern if the author is making an argument for personal gain, offering an opinion, giving a factual report, or relaying personal observation. To do this you need to analyze the person’s writing for objectivity or subjectivity. Remember that, in essence, anyone can put anything they want on the web. There is no one checking webpages for accuracy or truth. Think about why someone would spend money to post the page.

Sources: Where did the author gather the information presented? Was it from original research, experiments, observation, interviews, books and documents? Does the author or publisher provide references to locate the original sources of the information?

Timeliness: When and where was the material published? Far too often web pages are published and never updated. Look carefully for a date, and don’t be misled into thinking that online is necessarily more current than print!

Based on Debra Jones’ *Evaluation of the Internet Using Critical Thinking Skills* (Cabrillo College, Fall, 1997), p. 20-21.