Evaluating Websites

Accessibility and ease of use make the Internet an easy choice for research. However, data shared on the Web can lack quality assurance – anyone can publish information on the Web!

Because it can be difficult to know which sites contain credible information – and which do not - it’s important to learn how to critically evaluate material you find online.

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**Website Evaluation Criteria – the CRAAP Principles**

1. **Currency: the timeliness of information**
   - When was the information published or posted?
   - Is the information on the page outdated? When was it last updated?
   - Are the links up-to-date; are there dead links?

2. **Relevance/Coverage: the importance and scope of the information**
   - Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
   - Is the topic covered with sufficient depth and breadth? Is the information comprehensive enough for your needs?
   - Could you find the same or better information in another source?
   - What gives you confidence in the information? Would you feel comfortable citing this source in an academic paper?

3. **Authority: the source of the information**
   - Is the author/sponsor clearly identified? Is contact information easy to locate?
   - What are the author’s credentials? Is the author knowledgeable in his/her field (based on employment, publications, sponsorship by reputable organizations, etc.)
   - Does an organization support or sponsor the page? (Hint: In the URL, delete everything after the domain name - .com, .org, .edu, etc to reveal the sponsoring site).
   - What does the sponsoring site reveal about the source?

4. **Accuracy: the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content**
   - Where does the information come from?
   - Is it supported by evidence, such as footnotes or a reference list? What type of sources are being cited? websites? books? journals?
   - Can you verify information in another source?
   - Are there spelling, grammar, or typographical errors?
   - Do the links on the page complement the website’s theme?
5. **Purpose/Point of View: Why was the page written and for whom?**
   - Is the purpose of the page clear? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade?
   - Are there discernable biases?
   - Is the advertising content vs. informational content easily distinguishable?
   - Does the point of view appear objective or impartial?
   - Does the sponsoring organization have a political, philosophical, or ideological agenda?

**Practical Tips for Evaluating Websites**

1. **Examine the URL (web address). What can you learn?**
   - Delete everything from the URL after the domain name (.com, .org, .edu, .gov).
   - What type of organization is behind the website?
     - Non-profit (.org)
     - University (.edu)
     - Government (.gov)
     - Business (.com)
     - Personal (look for a ~)

2. **Look for an “About” Page.**
   - Who or what is the agency?
   - What are the author’s credentials or qualifications?
   - How is the organization funded?
   - Is contact information provided – does someone take responsibility for the content?
   - If there is no “About” page, work back through the URL to learn more about the hosting site.

3. **Analyze the content.**
   - Look for published or last updated date.
   - Are references provided?
   - Are links working or dead?
   - Is the language free of emotion?
   - Are there grammatical, spelling, or other errors?
   - Is the site well-organized? Is it easy to navigate the content?

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