



How To Evaluate Web Sites

No one knows exactly how many documents are on the Internet. The search engine Google claimed to have indexed more than 5 billion web pages by the year 2004. However many web pages exist, the question we need to ask is just how many of these web documents are of scholarly value? No one has an answer for this question.

To help you determine the educational value of a web site, here are some points to consider.

Accuracy

- Is the information factual?
- Is the author or creator an expert in the subject field or topic?
- Are reference resources for the web site's information provided?
- Does the web site's information represent cutting-edge research and reporting?

Authority

- Is the name of the author or creating organization provided?
- Is a contact name, address, telephone number, and/or an email address provided?
- Does the creator of the web site list the sources of information used in creating the web site?
- Is the author or creator an expert in the subject of the web site?
- Is the author or creator connected to an educational or governmental body or a reputable organization?

Bias/Objectivity

- Does the author or creator present just one particular side of an issue?
- Are both sides of a topic covered fairly and adequately on the web site?
- Is the tone of the language on the web site overly sympathetic or hostile?
- Do the graphics of the web site tend to support one point of view over another?

Content/Coverage

- Does the creator have relevant and interesting information to share?
- Has the creator of the web site included a proper title?
- Are links to additional resources included?
- Is the information accurate, up-to-date, reliable, and useful?
- Is the content covered in a fair, balanced, factual, and complete manner?

Currency

- Is the information up-to-date?
- Is a date of creation provided?
- Has the web site been updated at least once in the past six months to a year?

Design

- Is the web site well-organized for navigability?
- Can a visitor move easily from page to page within the web site?
- Is the web site interactive, that is, can visitors leave emails, comments, etc.?
- Are links clearly labeled?
- Are graphics used to support the written content?
- Are there so many graphics as to distract viewers from the written information?
- Is the text presented in a clear, easy to view font?

Technical Elements

- Do all the links on the web site work?
- Do the graphics download quickly?
- Do graphics have good, clear resolution?
- Is a text-only page offered for visitors who are easily distracted by graphics or who are in some way visually disabled?

For examples of the “good, bad, and ugly” in web sites, please see:

New Mexico State University Library Instruction Program: Handouts & Guides: Evaluation Tutorial (The Good, The Bad & The Ugly: Or, Why It's a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources) at <http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html>.

