Evaluating Websites

Searching the Internet

The amount of information on the Internet can be overwhelming. A simple search for the term “library” returns over 400,000,000 results. How do you find the information you’re looking for? And how do you tell the credible, accurate sites from all the others?

Internet Search Engines

When using an Internet search engine, combine search terms with ‘and,’ ‘or’ or ‘not’ in order to get efficient results. For example, searching for library AND science will retrieve results including both words, library OR science will return sites with either term, and searching for library NOT science will not retrieve sites with the term science. For more information on this searching method, view the Searching Techniques guide.

Evaluating Websites

Once you find websites that appear to be about your topic, it is important to evaluate the information found on the site – picking the site with the most attractive web design does not ensure that the information is accurate. Here are a few questions to consider when evaluating a website:

Authority

An authoritative website should provide information on where the information is coming from. Look for information about the author(s), such as their credentials (degrees, profession, etc.).

Also, be sure to check out the site’s domain name. Below is a key to understanding what some domain names say about their respective sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Used for...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.com</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Commercial (and some non-commercial) websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.org</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Non-profit agencies, open-source sites and some commercial sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.edu</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Educational (usually higher education) and research institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.mil</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>United States Department of Defense and its subsidiary organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.gov</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>United States government agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.net</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Wide variety of commercial and non-commercial sites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bias/Objectivity

An authoritative website should provide facts and/or well-informed analyses. It should not be comprised of unsubstantiated opinions.

The tone of an objective should not be overly emotional. The tone should be level and calm.

Currency

Always check to see when the site was last updated. A date should be somewhere on the site, usually near the bottom of the page. The currency of the information is particularly important when considering scientific and/or medical websites.

Use your brain!

Above all, use common sense when evaluating a website. There is no litmus test for the credibility of a website, and there is no guarantee for the quality of any information on the Internet. *Always think!*

For more information on evaluating websites, visit the following sites:

[Evaluating Websites: A Checklist](http://www.maryland.edu/libraries/evaluatingwebsites)  (University of Maryland Libraries)

[The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly, or, Why It’s a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources](http://www.nmsu.edu/libraries/evaluatingwebsites)  (New Mexico State University Library)

[Web Searching and Evaluating Websites](http://www.tsl.ttu.edu/Services/Teaching/evaluating)  (Texas State University Library)

For examples of credible websites, visit our [Recommend Websites](http://www.library.utexas.edu/research/researchmethods/websites) page.

Have questions or comments? Contact the library at 512.313.5050

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