



Victor Valley College Library

## EVALUATING WEB SITES

Anyone can create and post a Web site to the Internet, so it is extremely important to critically evaluate a site to determine if the information provided is reliable, accurate, objective, and current. The checklist below provides guidelines for evaluating Web sources.

### **Criteria #1: AUTHORITY**

To determine the authority of a site, look for information about the author and sponsoring institution:

- Is the author and/or sponsor of the site clearly identified?
- Does the author list his or her credentials, qualifications related to the subject, or other biographical details?
- Does the author list his or her affiliation to the sponsoring institution? Is there a link to background information about the sponsoring institution?
- Is there an e-mail link or address and telephone number available to contact the author or sponsor?

### **Criteria #2: ACCURACY**

It may be difficult to determine the accuracy of information which appears on a Web page, so in addition to considering the questions below, it is important to compare and contrast the information on a variety of Web sites or print sources related to the topic. Keep in mind that no one is responsible for verifying the accuracy of information that people post to Web sites.

- How credible is the site? The authority, timeliness, and sponsoring institution of the site may help you to answer this question.
- Is the information provided factual, well written and can it be substantiated? Does it include documentation and background information on the research method used to gain this information?
- Is the information cited and references or links to supporting electronic documents provided?
- Can the information be confirmed through print resources?
- Are there spelling, grammatical or typographical errors?
- Is the page completed or is it still under construction, and if so, is this clearly marked?

### **Criteria #3: OBJECTIVITY**

To help you determine if a site is objective or if it presents a biased point of view, consider the following:

- What is the purpose of the site & who is the intended audience? Does the site exist to inform, explain, persuade or sell?

Looking at the domain name may help you to answer this question:

- .com (commercial site) is probably promoting a product or service
  - .edu (educational site) or .gov (government site) are probably informational sites
  - .org (non-profit organizational site) may be advocating a certain viewpoint
  - a "~" or tilde symbol in the address means that it is a personal page, so it may not be officially endorsed by the sponsoring institution
- Is the sponsoring party of the site identifiable? What is the purpose or goal of the sponsoring party?
  - Are other points of view provided or does the information seem to be biased?
  - Are there links to outside Web sites? Or do links all point to internal documents?
  - What is the depth of the material presented? Are there references or citations? Is it comprehensive? How does it compare to related print sources or electronic documents?
  - Is there advertising on the page? If so, is it clearly differentiated from the information presented?

#### **Criteria #4: CURRENCY**

It may not be possible to judge the accuracy of information if we do not know when the information was created or updated. Look for the following details to determine the currency of a document:

- Are creation and/or revision dates listed in the footer of the document?
- Are there broken links? Invalid links may reveal that the site has not been maintained.
- Is any other information provided about how often the site is updated?

#### **Criteria #5: OTHER FACTORS**

Other factors to consider when evaluating a website include:

- Is the site well designed and well organized? Does it load into the browser quickly and efficiently?
- Consider the functionality of the site: do the pages make good use of images or other features like sound or video? Does the site require special software or plug-ins which must be downloaded or installed? Do these features enhance the site, or make it more difficult to use?
- Are there broken links? Are there links that lead to useful or irrelevant sites?
- Are there spelling, grammatical or typographic errors?
- Does the site provide valuable information for your topic, or are there print resources that may be better suited to your research?