



# Library/Learning Commons

## Web Site Evaluation

The Web is great for checking the news, looking for phone numbers, finding a last minute deal on eBay and because anyone can host their own site, to express their own opinions. Such attributes at your fingertips are also what make the Web problematic when conducting research for a paper or project for class. The Web should be used as a way to enhance your research, for much of the information that you will find may be unreliable, inaccurate, or out of date — information you should not use.

Broad topics such as diabetes or stem cell research will yield hundreds to thousands of pages through a search engine, many of which could have little or nothing to do with your specific topic. Searching for a controversial topic such as abortion or gay marriage will also pose a problem because of the range of viewpoints with questionable authority found throughout the Web and the bias that a single site may contain. Searching for specific information may produce few useful pages to read or you may find that you will have to pay for the information due to copyright issues.

If you decide to venture out into the Web for sources for your research, you should understand the criteria used to analyze Web sites so that you know that you are using sites that are both informative and credible. Before you choose a site from a list procured by a search engine, take a look at the domain name suffix found at the end of the Web address. Often, those ending with .edu (education), .org (organization), or .gov (for the U.S. government) may be found to be more reliable than sites that end with .com which indicates a commercial site.

Once you choose a site, use the five essential criteria developed by librarians Jan Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate at Widener University. These criteria include: authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, and coverage. For each of the five criteria, ask yourself the questions that follow to check for reliability.

### **Authority:**

- Who is the author?
- Is the author listed?
- Is the author someone reputable?
- Is the site sponsored by a particular organization?

### **Accuracy:**

- Is the information true?
- Can you verify statistics?
- Does the author cite other works?
- Are there spelling or grammar mistakes?

### **Objectivity:**

- Whose side are they on?
- Once again, is there a sponsor for the site?
- Are inflammatory words used to influence your ideas?
- If there is an "About Us" link, does it tell you the aim of the Web site directly?

### **Currency:**

- How old is the information?
- Does the site have a copyright date on it?
- Is the site updated frequently?

**Coverage:**

- How much information is provided?
- Is the information exhaustive or limited?
- Can you find the same information in a book or an article?
- Does the site direct you to other Web sites that have similar topics?

**For more information about evaluating Web resources:**

Evaluate Web Resources. Jan Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate. 2003. 12/1/2005.

[http://www3.widener.edu/Academics/Libraries/Wolfgram\\_Memorial\\_Library/Evaluate\\_Web\\_Pages/659/](http://www3.widener.edu/Academics/Libraries/Wolfgram_Memorial_Library/Evaluate_Web_Pages/659/).

This site provides an excellent tutorial and exercises on Web evaluation. It also links to information about evaluating particular sites such as personal, news, or organizational sites.