

Introduction to Web Page Evaluation

There are many different kinds of Web Sites. When you are doing research, you need to find informational Web sites, which give facts about your topics. Good informational Web sites are created by libraries, colleges, universities, government agencies, museums and other organizations. Things to look for:

- If the site address (URL) ends in “.edu”, it came from a school. The abbreviation “.com” is for commercial, meaning that a business has put up the Web site. If you see “.org” that stands for organization (like a museum, foundation or church). Government agency Web sites end in “.gov” or “.mil.”
- The name between http://www. and the first / usually indicates what organization owns or leases the server the Web site is housed on. Learning about the organization that hosts a site can give you important information about the site’s credibility.
- Personal Web sites are created by individual people. Warning! Be careful if you use a personal Web site since anyone can put up a Web site. These sites often have a tilde symbol ~ as part of the URL (web address), or are blogs. They are only helpful if the author knows a lot about a subject. If you are looking for reliable information, it needs to come from an expert.

Web sites are made up of Web pages. These are a lot like the pages of a book. A Web site starts with a home page, which is the first page you see. Some home pages have a feature called a site map that shows you how the site is organized. Other home pages have a list of terms or bullets on the side or along the top which are called hyperlinks (or links for short). A link is a word, a group of words, or a picture/icon that you can click on to get to another page. Sometimes there are links in the middle of a paragraph which are usually underlined or in a different color (usually blue). Most Web pages have a title at the top that can give you more information about what they contain.

- Look for text at the top or bottom of a page that says who created the Web site (an author or an organization). Look for a name, email address, author’s credentials or an “About Us” or “Contact Us” link.
- Determine the stated or implied purpose of the site. Web sites that seek to inform, explain, or supply facts and data may be useful as opposed to sites that seek to promote, sell, sway opinions, etc. Is the site trying to sell or convince you of something? Be aware of hidden agendas!
- Where did the information come from? Look for mention of additional sources and a list of references. Are links included to other viewpoints? Including opposing opinions on controversial issues may indicate that the site creators intend to be fair.
- Often you will see a date that tells you when the site or individual pages were created. Look for the date the content was last updated. The last update is usually at the very top or bottom of the page. Check the copyright date - Web sites that are not updated regularly may be old and “abandoned.”