



## EVALUATING INTERNET SOURCES

Internet sources can be very timely and very useful, but they should not be your sole source of information because there are also books, journals, government publications, brochures, newspapers, etc. to read, and knowledgeable people to interview.

Evaluating Internet sources is particularly difficult because anyone can put up anything he or she wants to on the Internet. There is no way to monitor what's there and no fact checking, though there are some site ratings you can check.

Be sure to document what you find on the Internet in such a way that others can locate what you found. This is most easily done when you access the data. Include the date you accessed the material since it can be changed or updated later. Be sure to browse around on the Web site to be sure you know who the author is, what the sponsoring organization is, and so on so that you can cite the source fully and so that you can evaluate it properly before including it in your paper.

### Authorship

-Is there an author or organization clearly indicated? If there's an author, go back to the questions listed above about authors and ask yourself how reputable this person is. Can the author be contacted? (If an e-mail address is given, you can contact that person or look up the address by using the "finger" command.)

-What can you find out about the author?

If there is no information on the site, use a search engine or search Usenet. You may find the author's homepage or other documents which mention this person. Or look up the person on the Internet Directory of Published Writers (<http://www.writers.net>). If the person is associated with a university, look at the university Web site.

-If there is an organization sponsoring the page, what can you learn about the organization and who they are?

(You can search the site by following links to its home page or going back to a previous level on the site by eliminating the last part of the address, after a "/" mark or a period. Another way to find the organization is to go to the View menu at the top of your Web browser and open the Document Information window where the owner of the document is listed.)

Does the organization take responsibility for what's on the site? Does it monitor or review what's on the site? Look at the address for the site. Does it end in .edu, indicating that it's an educational institution? If it has .gov, it should be fairly objective government-sponsored material. Addresses with .org are usually non-profit organizations that are advocacy groups. (The Sierra Club is an example of an advocacy group. Their postings will conform to their goals of

environmental preservation. Information posted by advocacy groups may be accurate but not entirely objective.) If the site has a .com address, it's most likely promoting or selling something.

## **Accuracy of information**

-Is there documentation to indicate the source of the information? There may be a link to the original source of the information.

-Can you tell how well researched the information is?

-Are criteria for including information offered?

-Is there a bibliography or links to other useful sites? Has the author considered information on those sites or considered viewpoints represented there?

-Is the information current? When was it updated? (You can check at the bottom for a "last revised" date and/or notice if there are numerous dead links on the site.)

-Is there any indication of bias on the site?

-Does the site have any credentials such as being rated by a reputable rating group? If you see a high rating, is that because of the soundness of the content or the quality of the design? (An attractive page is not a reason for accepting its information as reliable.)

## **Goals of the site**

-What is the purpose of the site? To provide information? Advertise? Persuade?

-Are the goals of the site clearly indicated?

-Who is the intended audience?

-Is there a lot of flash and color and gimmicks to attract attention? Is that masking a lack of sound information or a blatant attempt to get you to do or buy something?

## **Access**

-How did you find the site? Were there links from reputable sites? From ads? If you found the site through a search engine, that means only that the site has the words in the topic you are researching prominently placed or used with great frequency. If you found the site by browsing through a subject directory that may mean only that someone at that site registered it with that directory.

Always proofread, revise, and, when possible, sit down with a tutor and talk about your writing.