

Evaluating Sources

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Printed information resources such as books, magazines, journals and reference sources go through a series of “tests” before arriving in a library (e.g. editing, peer review, independent review, selection by librarians). Information sources (web pages, etc.) on the internet are generally unfiltered. Anyone anywhere with a computer can create a website so it is important to critically evaluate the information you find. Here are some things to consider when choosing any source:

Authority

Questions to Ask

- Who is the author/creator of the information? Can you tell? Is there a publisher or sponsor listed?
- What are the author's qualifications and does this indicate the expertise needed to write on this topic?
- Is the author mentioned or cited in other sources you've examined?

Tips for Web Sources

- Check the URL/domain to see if this reveals anything about the site.
- Read the “about us” page, mission, and author bios if available. If you can't find any of these, try backtracking the URL, removing parts of it to view the web homepage. But also look elsewhere to learn if others can confirm this website; search in Google for the author or institutional author.
- If no author is listed, search easywhois.com to find out the owner of the website.

Purpose

Questions to Ask

- Why do you think the institution or author created this resource? (to inform? to persuade? to promote? to sell a product?)
- Who is the intended audience for this information? (Anyone? Scholars? Particular groups of people?)
- How is the author/creator affiliated with this institution (Employee? Owner? Official?) Would this bias the information he/she presents?

Tips for Web Sources

- See the tips about *authority* to learn more about author and organization's background that may help you to identify the purpose of the website.
- Look for unstated purposes that may be hinted at in the aim of the organization or the use of advertising on the site.

Currency

Questions to Ask

- When was the information created? Has it been recently updated?
- Is the information's date appropriate for your topic?
- The topic determines how recent your sources need to be; for example, a topic from current events or in a rapidly changing field such as nursing needs the most recent sources available. Older material may be suitable for historical or biographical topics.
- Other criteria being equal, the more current, the better.

Tips for Web Sources

- Content may still be out of date even if last updated date given is recent.
 - Compare information to other sources
 - Test links to other websites

Content

Questions to Ask

- Is it relevant? Does it relate directly to your topic?
- Depth of coverage: Does it cover the topic comprehensively? Is it overly simplified, or much too specialized and technical?
- Documentation: are opinions and facts supported by reference to other authorities or footnotes?
- If a controversial topic, are conflicting points of view acknowledged?
- Are emotional words and expressions used to sway the reader?
- Is the presentation logical and sensible?
- Point of view: is the material biased by the author's personal beliefs, and/or the general political or social climate?
- Can the facts be verified in other credible sources?

Tips for Web Sources

- Look for the original source of the information.
- Review multiple sources on the topic from different perspectives to assess the level of bias and accuracy.

Conclusion

After considering all these questions, does the source seem appropriate for your needs?

Questions? Ask a Librarian:

In Person:.....Library Information Desk

Phone:585-343-0055 Ext. 6419

Email:Click on Email from the library's web page

Chat:Click on Chat online from the library's web page