Evaluating Internet Sources

AUTHORITY (RELIABILITY)

Identify the website’s domain (URL):

.edu – A higher education institution
.org – advocacy site (such as a not-for-profit)
.net – network organization site
.com – Business or commercial site
.gov – A federal government site
.nd.gov – A state government site
.de (Deutschland) – country site
~ (tilde) – Usually indicates a personal page

Is there an author’s name & is the author associated with a reputable institution or organization?
Is there other creator information (an organization, sponsor or publisher)?
Is contact information available (e-mail address, location & phone number)?
Is there an “about this site” link and is it up-to-date?
Is the author’s education and background related to the topic? Compare these 2 org sites:
http://www.martinlutherking.org/ (hosted by Stormfront—a white supremacist group)
http://www.thekingcenter.org/ (hosted by “The King Center”—established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change)

CURRENCY (UP-TO-DATE)

When was the page created? Is a date given?
Is there a revision date? Is a revision date important to the validity of the information?
Or are you seeking information from an earlier time?
Do all of the links work?

COVERAGE (SCOPE) & PURPOSE

What is the purpose of this site? Is there a vision, mission, or values statement?
Why did the creator/sponsor create this site? What do they gain from its existence?
Are all aspects of your topic covered, both good and bad? What’s left out?
Is the coverage of your topic in-depth or superficial?
ACCURACY & OBJECTIVITY (FACTS OR BIAS)
Is the information presented as opinion or fact? Are the conclusions logical?
Is the information free of bias or are the creator’s or sponsoring agency’s biases stated?
Is the information the same as what you are finding elsewhere?
Are the conclusions drawn from research studies? Are sources cited for the information?
Is the advertising clearly separated from the information?

USEFULNESS (RELEVANCE)
Does the information add new information to your research?
Is some information found only on this site? If so, is it credited to a reliable source?

STRUCTURE (ORGANIZATION & FORMAT)
Does the text follow basic rules of grammar, spelling, and composition?
Are there obvious errors in facts or information?
Are the links relevant to the information presented? Do the links work?

AUDIENCE (INTENDED READERS)
Who is the target audience? Academic researchers? Children? Teens? Consumers?
What is the reading level of the page? For Adults? For Researchers? For Consumers?
What signals about the desired audience does the design of the web page suggest (based on banner ads, animated images, or lots of text with little decoration, etc.)

NEED MORE HELP? Ask a Librarian
Chat: https://und.edu/chat/library-cfl-support-form.cfm
Phone: 701-777-4629
Hours: http://library.und.edu/about/hours.php

This handout was adapted from portions of the following:
Avery, Susan. Evaluating Internet Sources. 29 August 2012.
http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/webeval.html (checked 22 September 2014).
Hull, Tracy L. & Kelley A. Lawton. Evaluating Web Pages. 17 March 2000. Updated to: