

Evaluating websites

Study Guide

Published resources – books, videos, magazines and journals are subject to a review process. This ensures that certain publication standards are met and that they contain accurate information. The internet, however, is not owned or governed by any particular organisation, therefore the same standards *do not apply* to the information posted onto it. Before using a website you should check the quality and appropriateness of the information it contains.

Evaluating what you find in the course of your research is very important.

Here are a few things to consider:

AUTHORITY

- Is it clear who is responsible for the site? Check the web address (URL) for whether the site is educational (.edu), government (.gov), business (.com), organisational (.org) or personal. You may also find (.net) originally for organisations involved in networking technologies or sometimes (.co) for companies
- Is the site part of a larger reputable organisation?
- Can you find any statement of copyright?
- Are the contributors or authors named?
- Have the contributors provided details about their qualifications, experience or position to write on the subject?
 - Can you be sure these statements are true – try ‘Googling’ their names to see if they have written other similar pieces, or if they appear, or are referred to, on other webpages
- Beware blogs and wikis – these are spaces anyone can create or edit regardless of their credentials or experience. Wikipedia is an unrestricted wiki, written and edited by thousands of contributors from all walks of life. Moderators and administrators monitor the site for obscene or abusive language or strong political opinions, but do not necessarily check all the content. Use it as a starting point or for background information but move on to other more credible sites

CURRENCY

- When was the information first written?
- Has the material recently been updated or revised?
- Are sources (if cited) current?
- If there are links, are they still available and current?

ACCURACY

- Is the material presented in a logical, grammatical, spelling-error free and clear manner?
- Are there links to other sites? Do they still connect? Are they quality sites? Have they recently been updated?
- Is access reliable?
- Country of site - will it be relevant to us?
- Are the sources cited relevant?
- Is the information complete? Sometimes a site can still be ‘under construction’

OBJECTIVITY

- Is bias evident? Look for this especially on personal home pages, organisational sites that may be promoting a particular viewpoint (e.g. political, environmental) or commercial sites promoting a particular product

SCOPE

- Does the title indicate the content of the site and its relevance to your needs?
- Is it a basic overview, in layperson terms, or comprehensive/academic? Is it presented in enough depth to do the topic justice?
- Is the site an index only? (e.g. to a list of other sites)
- Does the site give you new and important information?

PURPOSE

- To inform? e.g. news items
- To explain? e.g. to teach you something, demonstrate
- To persuade? e.g. to sell, convince you of a certain point of view

DESIGN

- Is the site attractive and user-friendly? Look at the menu design, colour, size of print and readability.
- Does the site contain text and graphics that are complementary?
- Is advertising or entertainment content mixed up with informative content?
- Is it easy to navigate around the site? Is it clear where to go next, or where to find help?
- Does the site require specialised software?

SOME OTHER QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK YOURSELF

- Has the site been recommended to you by people you respect? (e.g. friend, lecturer, librarian)
- Is it the best source for the information?
- Does it match your expectations?
- Do you have to pay to access extra information?
- Is it Australian – does it need to be?

If you need further help, please speak to your campus library or student services staff. You can also learn more online at <https://tafesa.libguides.com/myinfoskills/evaluatingwebsites>.

The Web is only one source of information. To research a topic thoroughly, check your campus library catalogues or other libraries. There may also be a resource guide available for your topic listing items held in the library or available elsewhere. Remember to keep a record of the websites you do use and the date you viewed them as these details are needed to complete your reference list or bibliography.

“We live in a world where unfortunately the distinction between true and false appears to become increasingly blurred by manipulation of facts, by exploitation of uncritical minds, and by the pollution of the language.”- Arne Tiselius (Swedish biochemist)