

Georgia Perimeter College – Decatur Campus Learning Resources Center

Evaluating Internet Resources

Why evaluate Internet resources?

When researching a topic it is important to evaluate information you come across to make sure it is reliable. While all sources of information, both print and electronic should be evaluated it is especially important to evaluate information found online.

To publish information in print, authors must submit their works to several steps. Reputable publishers and editors generally evaluate materials for content and reliability before publishing books. Articles submitted to scholarly journals must undergo peer review before being accepted for publication.

No such quality control measures exist for the Internet, however. Anyone with a computer, Internet access and a little knowledge can publish anything on a web site. To determine the quality of information, judge Internet resources according to the following criteria.

Authority

Who is responsible for the information on the web site? If you can't determine the author of the site, be suspicious of the content. If the author is the site is available, determine what qualifications she has related to the subject of the site. Search biographical information in the library or run the author's name through the library catalog or a journal database to see if she has published about the topic in other types of sources. If there is an email address for the author contact her with any questions you have about the information on the site.

Currency

When was the web site last updated? If there isn't an update date somewhere on the page, or if the last update was a long time ago, be suspicious of the information on the site. It might not be the most current information available about your topic. Also, if the site doesn't mention recent developments on the topic you might be missing important, up to date information on your topic. Another easy way to check for currency is to check any links to other web sites. If a lot of the links are dead or out of date the site may not have been properly maintained.

Objectivity

Does the site take into account a variety of viewpoints on the subject? Reliable Internet resources should at least mention other points of view or provide links to additional resources on the topic. If the site does not mention or link to other resources the author may not want you to have any points of comparison for the information presented. In addition, a bibliography or references to print resources shows that the author has done her homework and is willing to stand behind the information presented.

Bias

Does the site present a particular opinion on the topic or represent a particular point of view? Read carefully and critically to determine the positions or philosophies guiding the authors of the site. For example, The National Rifle Association web site will present information in favor of gun ownership and against gun control laws. Bias does not automatically undermine the authority of a site, however. All publications have some sort of editorial slant or bias. Be aware of the positions of any source of information and take them into account when deciding if and how to use the information presented.

Accuracy

How accurate is the information presented on the site? If you have questions about the accuracy of any information found on the Internet, attempt to verify it in another sources such as an encyclopedia or other library resources. If you can't verify the claims made on a web site, there is a good chance they aren't true. If the author cites a wide variety of sources to back up the information on the site, there is a good chance the information presented is accurate. If anything you read on the Internet sounds fishy or too good to be true, investigate it further. Common sense is still a good barometer of false claims.