

# Six Criteria for Evaluating Web Pages



Ask yourself these questions and use these tools to determine if the information from a website is trustworthy. Remember that *anyone can publish anything* on the internet and you need to be a savvy information consumer!

## 1. AUTHORITY

- Is there an author or sponsoring body (organization, company) and is the name of the author or sponsoring body listed?
- Are the author(s) qualifications or credentials listed?
- Is contact information (e-mail, address, or phone number) included?
- Is the listed name different from the "Webmaster"?
- Where is the document published? Check the URL domain (.edu, .org, .com, .gov).
- Follow the money trail...find out who registered and pays for the domain name for the website using "Whois.Net"
  - Go to <http://www.whois.net/search.cgi?as=1>
  - Search for the domain name of the website that you are evaluating – use the "Match String Left" option
  - For example, type in FULLERTON.EDU to look up the domain name for CSU Fullerton website
  - Once you find the domain name listing, click on "whois record" link to view the domain name and registration information
- A tilde (~) in the webpage's URL usually indicates that it is a personal page, rather than part of an institutional website.
- Make a mental note of the domain section of the URL, as follows:

<b>.edu</b>	educational (can be anything from serious university research to a student's faculty member's home page, which vary in reliability)
<b>.gov</b>	governmental (usually contains reliable data)
<b>.com</b>	commercial (may be trying to sell a product)
<b>.net</b>	network (may provide services to commercial or individual customers)
<b>.org</b>	organization (usually created by a nonprofit institution; may be trying to persuade the reader; may be biased)
<b>.mil</b>	United States military sites, agencies, and some academies

## 2. OBJECTIVITY

- Has the author or organization clearly stated the goals and/or aims of the site? (The Web often functions as a virtual soapbox).
- If objectivity is important, is the information presented in an objective manner?
- Is a particular point of view being presented?
- Is there a bias, either explicit or implied?
- Is the information presented free of advertising? If there is advertising, is it clearly differentiated from the informational content?
- Is this an "Infomercial" Web page? (On the Web, the distinction between advertising and information can easily become blurred).

### 3. ACCURACY

- If facts and figures are given, are they accurate?  
Are the sources for any factual information clearly listed?
- Can they be verified in another source?
- How does this information compare with other sources of information on this topic?

One of the first things to look for in a webpage is *spelling errors*. Spelling and grammatical errors not only indicate a lack of editorial control, but also undermine the accuracy of the information. It is also extremely important that statistics, research findings, and other claims are *documented* and *cited very carefully*. Otherwise, the author could be distorting information or using unreliable data. In the best situations, claims or statistics on webpages are supported by original research or by hyperlinks or footnotes to the primary sources of the information.

### 4. CURRENCY

- When was the page produced?
- When was it last updated?
- Is any information on the page outdated?
- Are the links up-to-date? Are there references to sites which have moved?

### 5. CONTENT/RELEVANCY

- Does the page meet your research needs or purpose?
- Is the subject adequately covered?
- Are the links (if any) evaluated/annotated and do they complement the page's theme?
- If other sources are quoted, is the information accurately cited?
- Is all the information on the site free, or is there a fee to link to some or all of the information?

### 6. AESTHETICS

- Site is laid out clearly and logically with well organized subsections
- Writing style is appropriate for the intended audience
- Site is easy to navigate, including Clearly labeled Back, Home, Go To Top icons/links, Internal indexing links on lengthy pages
- Links to remote sites all work
- Search capability is offered if the site is extensive
- Is the design of the page visually appealing or is it too cluttered?
- If page requires special software to view the information, how much are you missing if you don't have the software?