

## Evaluating Web Pages

### Authority - Who wrote the page?

- ✓ Look for the author's name near the top or the bottom of the page. If you can't find a name, look for a copyright credit (©) or link to an organization.

### What are the author's credentials?

- ✓ Look for biographical information or the author's affiliations (university department, organization, corporate title, etc.).

### Did the author include contact information?

- ✓ Look for an email link, address, or phone number for the author. A responsible author should provide contact information.

### Whose web site is this? What organization is sponsoring the web page?

- ✓ Look at the domain (.com, .edu, .org, etc.).
- ✓ Look for an "about this site" link.
- ✓ Be careful of a web page that has a tilde (~) in the URL. This usually identifies a personal directory on a web site.
- ✓ Internet service providers feature personal pages. Be careful of web pages from those sites, too.

### Purpose/intended audience. What is the purpose of the page? Why did the author create it?

- ✓ The purpose could be advertising, advocacy, news, entertainment, opinion, scholarship, satire, etc.
- ✓ Some pages have more than one purpose. For example, <http://www.dowjones.com/> provides free business information but also encourages you to subscribe to the Wall Street Journal or other Dow Jones products.

### Who is the target audience?

- ✓ Academic researchers? Kids? Political extremists?
- ✓ Determine the reading level of the page. Is it easy to read or challenging? Does it assume previous knowledge of the subject?
- ✓ Consider the design of the web page. Are there banner ads and animated GIF's, or does the page present a lot of text with little decoration?

### Is the site current?

- ✓ Is there a date at the top or bottom of the page? A recent date does not always mean the information is current. The content might be years out of date even if the given date is recent. (The last update of the page might have consisted of changing an email address or fixing a typo.)

### Is the information up-to-date?

- ✓ This takes a little more time to determine. Compare the information on the web page to information available through other sources. Broken links are a sign of an out-of-date page.
- ✓ In general, information for science, technology, and business ages quickly. Information in the humanities and social sciences ages less quickly. However, old information can still be perfectly valid.

### Objectivity v. bias

- ✓ Is the author being objective or biased?
- ✓ Biased information is not necessarily "bad", but you must take the bias into account when interpreting or using the information given.
- ✓ Look at the facts the author provides, and the facts the author doesn't provide.
- ✓ Are the facts accurately and completely cited?
- ✓ Is the author fair, balanced, and moderate in his or her views, or is the author overly emotional or extreme?
- ✓ Based on the author's authority, try to identify any conflict of interest.
- ✓ Determine if the advertising is clearly separated from the objective information on the page.

### Does the author support the information he or she uses?

- ✓ Look for links or citations to sources. Some academic web pages include bibliographies.

### Is the support respectable?

- ✓ Does the page cite well-known sources or authorities?
- ✓ Does the page cite a variety of sources?
- ✓ Do other pages on the same topic cite some of the same sources?
- ✓ The web page in question should have a mix of internal links (links to web pages on the same site or by the same author) and external links (links to other sources or experts). If a web page makes it hard for you to check the support, be suspicious.

### Is the web the right place to do your research?

- ✓ Some kinds of information are not available on the free web.
- ✓ Also, some kinds of information are easier to find using library resources.