

Evaluating Internet Resources

No. 3 in the Writing Center Handout Series

The Internet makes information from around the world readily available to researchers; however, just about anybody can post information there. Students should carefully consider what information they use from the Internet for academic research. Here are several questions to ask yourself as you evaluate your search results.

What type of search led you to the website?

Search results from academic databases such as Galileo and Lexus Nexus provide sources like journal articles, newspapers, and books that have been printed elsewhere (i.e. sources that have been edited and verified by publishers). Large search engines such as Yahoo and Google may lead to equally credible sites; however, the results tend to yield just as many dead ends.

What type of website is it?

Is the website published by a credible institution? Is it a personal webpage? Does it belong to a company, an advertiser, or nonprofit organization? How is the information you are researching related to the type of website where you found it? Is there anything about the organization that might make the information biased? For example, if the publisher is a company or political organization, are they trying to "sell" you on something? Biases and different purposes can mean the information is slanted, misleading, or even incorrect.

Who is the author? What gives him or her the authority to write on the subject?

Perhaps the author is a scholar in that particular field of study. Perhaps the information has been compiled from other resources (which should be cited on the page and may be fruitful links). Or maybe the author is simply someone who is interested in the subject just like you are. Oftentimes information on the author is unavailable, but the publisher of the site should be able to provide you with the information.

How does this information compare with other material you have found on the subject?

If the information you find on a website is completely different from anything else you have read, it isn't necessarily wrong, but you may want to double-check its sources. Do not use information simply because it says something you want to include in your paper.

When was the website posted? Is it updated regularly?

Depending on your area of research, the date of publication may or may not be relevant.

Clues to the credibility of the information on the website:

- Links/References/Bibliography of other credible resources
- Availability of information on the author
- Explanation of research methods or gathering of data
- Verifiable background information

For more information on using internet sources, see

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfhl/evaluate.htm>

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/webeval.html>



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