

GETTING STARTED WITH WEB EVALUATION

ACCURACY

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

It is important that any website you use for research is accurate. Of course, if you are just learning about a topic, you might not have the subject expertise to know if the information is true. Even if you don't know much about the topic, knowing the authors name and background give you some indication if the information is accurate. Knowing the reason for the website's existence also can give you insight. For example, if the website is designed to persuade, the content might be biased.

HOW CAN I JUDGE IT?

- Consider the site's authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage as described below.

AUTHORITY

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Authority focuses specifically on the creator of the website content. If the author is an expert in the field, the website is likely to be a better source for research. Authority can also come from the way the site is published. If the site is hosted by an educational institution, there is a good chance it is more authoritative than one hosted by a commercial company.

HOW CAN I JUDGE IT?

- Is the author a different person from the webmaster?
- Does the author have an academic background in the topic of the website?
- Who is the publisher, and what are the publisher's qualifications?
- Does the website end in ".edu" or ".org" rather than ".com"?

OBJECTIVITY

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Websites can vary from objective to biased. It is important to consider the author's goals and objectives in creating their page. Opinions, excessive lack or depth of details, and persuasive statements can indicate bias. Bias isn't inherently bad. If you are writing a paper on a controversial topic, you would want to get

perspectives from both sides of the topic. However, you should be aware of the bias so that you don't use biased website's statements as facts.

HOW CAN I JUDGE IT?

- Does the site include a mission statement or purpose?
- Can you tell if the site is primarily for advertising, persuasive, or objective information sharing?
- Ask yourself "why was this page created?" and "who is the target audience of this website?"

CURRENCY

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Currency is an important aspect of websites. It's so easy to make a new one, that it's easy for people to forget about putting them up, and the content can go out of date without anyone knowing. Consider if there is a date on the site, if any of the links are broken, and if the information is the type of information that goes out of date quickly. For example, a website about iPods that hasn't been updated since 2006 would be very out of date for that particular topic. A website on the civil war that hasn't been updated since 2004 might still have relevant information.

HOW CAN I JUDGE IT?

- What is the most recent date on the page?
- Do the links on the page work?
- Does the content seem outdated?

COVERAGE

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Coverage is a general term that is used to describe the breadth of information on a website. This is where you consider if the information is presented in a way that makes sense, if the images on a site complement the text, and if the links seem appropriate to the content.

HOW CAN I JUDGE IT?

- What is the appearance of the website?
- Do the images and links seem appropriate for the topic?

This evaluation method is based on Jim Kapoun's "Teaching WEB evaluation: A guide for library instruction." C&RL News (July/August 2008): 522-523.

WEBPAGE EVALUATION

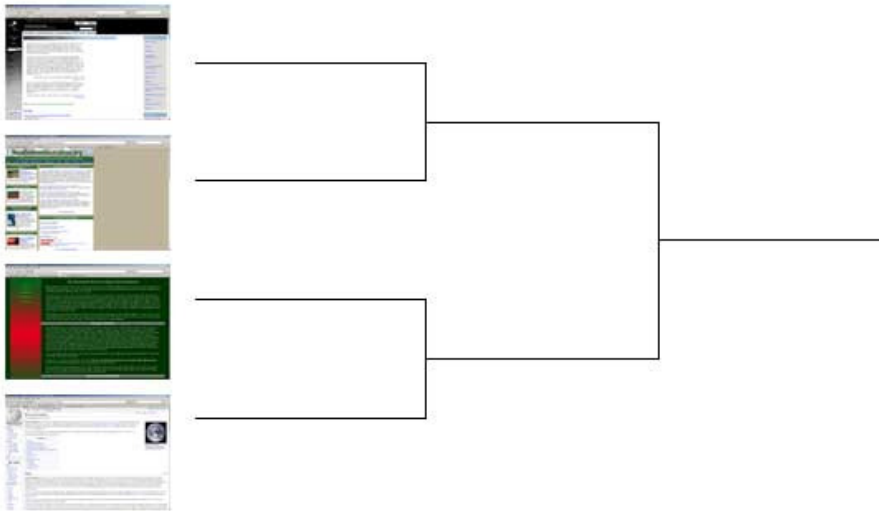
REVIEW

As you've heard before, the web is a free resource and anyone who wants to can publish there. Sometimes this means you find websites with bad information. Other times you find really good websites. One way to make sure you're using the good ones is to consider using websites that have been reviewed by experts. Here are a couple places to get started:

- The [Librarian's Index to the Internet](#) is a collection of sites approved by librarians. These sites are often appropriate for academic research.

COMPARISON

Comparing websites will help you determine which ones are the best for your topic. If you do a web search and find two different sites that look useful, open them both up and compare them. You might find that one has been updated more regularly, has more information, or seems less biased. That website is the one to choose. Then, you might compare that site with another one and see which site is most appropriate at that point. Think of it as a basketball tournament, except instead of basketball teams, you're comparing websites.



CORROBORATION

Corroboration is a useful technique. When you find new information that you don't know to be true or not, look for another source to back up the information. If you find another site with the same information, that site corroborates the information on the first one. For example:

The screenshot shows the RYT Hospital website with a central image of a man's pregnant belly. The page is titled "POP! THE FIRST MALE PREGNANCY" and includes a "SPECIAL REPORT" from U.S. News. The website layout includes a navigation bar, a main content area with a live image, and a sidebar with media coverage and testimonials. The testimonials include quotes from LIZ (United Kingdom), ANNE (United States), and BOB (Senegal). The page also features a "video archive" section and a footer with copyright information and links to Home, Privacy Notice, and Disclaimer.

This website looks like a really good hospital website explaining how they have helped a man become pregnant. However, we know from our personal experience that men cannot be pregnant, nor have we heard any news stories about this topic. Since we can't corroborate this information, we know this information is false.

When corroborating, remember that corroborating sources that are varied and peer-reviewed sources are more effective. Sometimes you might find the best corroborating document is in paper.

This contextual evaluation of the web is based on Marc Meola's "Chuckling the Checklist: A Contextual Approach to Teaching Web-Site Evaluation." portal: Libraries and the Academy 4.3 (2004) 331-344.