

FIT 100

Assignment 2: Evaluating Web Sites (or, Now that you've found it, how good is it?)

"You may have heard that 'knowledge is power,' or that information, the raw material of knowledge, is power. But the truth is that only some information is power:

reliable information"

~Robert Harris~

Reading for Assignment 2:

Evaluating the Quality of Information on the Internet: A Checklist

http://www.virtualchase.com/quality/checklist_print.html

Introduction:

Many of you have done a fair amount of browsing and searching on the Internet. Have you ever stopped to question the content of sites you encounter when you are looking for cold, hard facts?

Anyone can publish on the Internet and most of that content is not verified for accuracy, unlike many print journals and other publications. The job of fact verification is left up to you, the user. Expert searching of the Internet for information is a valuable skill, but knowing how to evaluate what you find is something of an art. The same skills that go into evaluating print materials can be applied to evaluating web content. Honing those skills until they become second nature will make the task of wading through the glut of information out there a little easier.

Objectives:

- In a search engine, use basic search strategies to bring back sites with information on a topic.
- Use evaluation techniques to determine authenticity and credibility of web sites.

Online Resources:

Web search tips from Search Engine Watch:

<http://www.searchenginewatch.com/facts/index.html>

List of Search Engines by function:

<http://www.searchenginewatch.com/links/>

Evaluation Criteria:

When looking at information provided on the Internet, keep in mind the following criteria (you do NOT have to answer the questions listed in each criteria in writing for the sites evaluated):

Accuracy

- Is the information reliable? Free from errors?
- Are the sources of information listed? Can you verify them?

Authority

- Is the author an expert in the field?
- Is the publisher of the site reputable? What does the domain of the document tell you? (Is it an educational institution, .edu, or a government site, .gov, etc.)
- Can you tell the difference between an educational site, and a site that is simple hosted by an education domain?

Objectivity/Reasonableness

- Do you find any biases on the site?
- What is the motivation for the site? To inform? To persuade? To explain?
- Is the intended audience of the site indicated?

Currency

- How updated is the content? Is the date of last update easily found?

Coverage/Scope

- Does the site contain original information, or just a bunch of links?
- What topics are covered
- Is the topic covered in depth?

Accessibility

- Is the site consistently available?
- How many links are dead ends?
- Does it cost money to use the site?
- Do you have to register to use the site?

What happens when you encounter an "official" looking site? At first glance it appears authoritative and reliable. Deciding whether the information presented is accurate and objective, current and authoritative is a skill to be developed.

Web site evaluation is a contextual process. How you evaluate a site is usually dependent on your research task or information need. Are you looking for new ideas and opinions, facts on a subject, or evidence that supports your position on a topic? Answers to every question in the criteria listed above will not be found for every site. The art of web site evaluation is to obtain answers to enough of your questions that **IN YOUR JUDGEMENT** the site has substance, merit, reliability, authenticity, etc. for your purposes-or it doesn't. In many cases it is your own knowledge or familiarity with some of the facts that may tip you off to inconsistencies in the web site content.

To Do:

Take a look at each site below. Select one group only to complete the assignment

Group 1:

- <http://www.democrats.org/news/bushlite/index.html>
- <http://www.georgewbush.com/>

Group 2:

- <http://www.melatonin.com/prod/melatonin/melfaq.htm>
- <http://www.herbalists.on.ca/forum/melatonin.html>

Group 3:

- <http://www.beefnutrition.org/> <http://www.shepherds-rod-message.org/health/awake.html>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/business/the_economy/newsid_334000/334874.stm

Group 4:

- <http://www.gatt.org/>
- <http://www.wto.org/>

1. Fill out the table criteria for EACH site in the group you choose. Note each web page's reliability/credibility/objectivity, etc in your chosen group. Mark each column with a number between 1 and 10.

1= Little or no accuracy, authority, etc. and 10 = very accurate, authoritative, etc.

Site Name/URL	Accuracy	Authority	Objectivity	Currency	Coverage/Scope	Accessibility

2. For each site in your chosen group, give a brief summary (1 paragraph) of the content. [If you are hand-writing your answers, use an extra sheet if you run out of room]

3. For each site in your group, indicate if you would use it as an objective source of information on the topic it describes? Why or why not?

4. Why do you trust [or not trust] the information from each site?

5. How credible do you consider each one? Why? [Think about the class lecture on different kinds of credibility]

6. What is the viewpoint of each site that you should consider as you read?

7. Who owns the domain of each site? List the organization and primary contact. Use your search skills to find a WhoIs server that will identify the owners of each website.

Internic and Network Solutions are 2 large sellers of domain names. They each provide searchable databases of current domains and their owners.

8. Use the search skills gained in Assignment 1 to do a search on a topic of interest (in other words, a topic in which you have some previous knowledge). Evaluate 3 sites found on the topic and reflect on how you evaluate them and what criteria influence your decision about the validity of the site. Mark the reliability of the site for the various criteria below.

Site Name/URL	Accuracy	Authority	Objectivity	Currency	Coverage/Scope	Accessibility

9. As you evaluate the sites on your topic, answer this question: What aspects of each website make it appear "authoritative" or credible?

10. Keep in mind the criteria you read at the beginning of this assignment.
 - A. Did the sites on your topic answer most of the questions? Which questions were NOT answered?

 - B. What criteria were best utilized on each site to make it seem more credible and believable, even if you, as a knowledgeable searcher on the topic, knew different?

Project 1 will require you to create a site that provides "misinformation" for the novice user. Will your site pass all, or most, of the above criteria?

Examples of sites that might be information, misinformation, spoof sites, parody sites or hoaxes. What do you think?

[Secondhand Smoke: The Big Lie](#)

[Antiretroviral Drug Interactions in the HIV-Infected Patient](#)

[HIV & AIDS: Rethinking AIDS Website](#)

[The True But Little Known Facts About Women and AIDS](#)

[The Greening of the Anti-Immigrant Agenda](#)

[Operation Gatekeeper: New Resources, Enhanced Results](#)

[Illegal Immigration Is a Crime](#)

[Human Growth Hormone Research](#)

[Human Test Subjects](#)

[Snow Job](#)

Aluminum Foil Deflector Beanie
<http://zapatopi.net/afdb.html>

Real Aroma
<http://realaroma.com/>

Feline Reactions to Bearded Men
<http://www.improb.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html>

GenoChoice
<http://www.genochoice.com/>

Dyhydrogen Monoxide

<http://www.dhmo.org/>

The Onion: News Parody

<http://www.theonion.com/>

Mankato, Minnesota Tourist site

<http://www.lme.mankato.msus.edu/mankato/mankato.html>

[The Role of the Media in Tobacco Control](#)

[Health Hazards of Tobacco: Some Facts](#)