Paul H. Thompson Library

EVALUATING WEB PAGES (When In Doubt, Doubt!*)*

We are defining web pages as the "free web"—websites that anyone can access. This handout does NOT refer to web-based databases purchased and provided by the library. These databases include NCLive, Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center, SIRS Researcher, Issues and Controversies, Science Resource Center, Biography Resource Center, Westlaw, and Current Issues: Health.

Question?	What to look for:
Authority	**Who wrote the page?** Look for the author's name near the top or bottom of the page. If you can't find a name, look for a copyright or an organization sponsoring the site or an "About Us" link. Try to determine if the author is qualified in the field. Look for biographical information or affiliations. The webmaster is not necessarily the author. **If there is not an author, what organization or company is sponsoring the web page?** Check to see if the organization is one that is recognized in the field and is suitable for the topic. Is there contact information? Look for an email link, address, and /or phone number that could be used to verify the author and /or organization. **Who published the page?** In general, the publisher is the agency or person operating the "server" computer from which the document is issued. The server is usually named in the first portion of the URL (between http:// and the first /). **Is it somebody's personal page?** Check the URL. The server could be a commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP) or other provider of web page hosting (like AOL or geocities.com). Look for a personal name (e.g., jdoe or doe) followed by a tilde (~) or the word "users" or "people". **Check the domain. *May indicate more reliable sites.** *Government sites will use .gov, .mil, .us, or other country code. *Educational sites will have an .edu extension. Nonprofit organizations or advocacy groups will have .org or some other country code. Corporate or "for profit" sites will have the .com extension.
Currency	**Is the information up-to-date?** The date that the page was updated does not necessarily reflect the currency of the information. Compare the information on the web page to other sources. Broken or inoperable links are one indication of an out-of date page. Undated factual or statistical data is very suspicious.
Objectivity/ Bias	**Is the author or organization being objective or biased?** A site may represent a specific point of view. This is not necessarily "bad" information, but you must be aware of the viewpoint when interpreting it. Look at the facts that are provided and the facts that are NOT provided. Check for overly emotional or inflammatory language. Based on the author's authority, try to identify any conflict of interest. Is advertising a key or primary component?
Purpose/ Scope	**What is the page's purpose?** Try to determine if the site was created to inform, explain, persuade, promote, sell, share, disclose, vent, or entice. See if the purpose is clearly stated. Also check whether the site contains original information or simply links. Could the page or site be ironic, like a satire or a spoof? Think about the tone of the page. Check for outrageous photographs or unlikely images. Just as some of the "commercials" on Saturday Night Live seemed real, a website could appear legitimate, when, in fact, it is a joke.

Sources:
University of California, Berkeley Library (2001, Nov. 26). Evaluating Web Pages: Questions and Strategies for Getting Answers. Retrieved June 27, 2002 from   .

Duke University Libraries (2001 Sept. 26). Evaluating Web Pages. Retrieved 27 June, 2002 from Updated 6/2/09