Evaluation of a Web Site

What to look for when evaluating a web site

**Purpose**
- Why was the page created?
  - Information - laws, rules, services, etc.
  - Entertainment - games, magazines, gossip, celebrities, etc.
  - Advertise/sell a product -
  - Influence beliefs/views - legal, moral, political issues
  - Provide up-to-the-moment news
  - Personal enjoyment - pages created by individuals not affiliated with any group or organization.

**Sponsor/Owner**
- Government agency (.gov)
- Educational institution (.edu)
- Business/company (.com)
- Association (.org)
- News bureau (.com)
- Personal - Anyone can put up a website for any purpose so use these sites with caution.

**Authority/Author**
- Who is responsible for the page? Read the “About Us” section.
- Is the author an expert in the field?
  - Are the author’s credentials posted? Are they accurate and verifiable?
  - What else has the author written?
  - Is contact information provided?
- Is there a review process or selection policy for the information on the site?

**Content**
- Is the topic covered comprehensively, partially, or is it an overview?
- Is the content reasonable? Does it make unbelievable claims? It is helpful to know a bit about your subject. Compare several quality sites for consistency.
- Are original sources linked or cited?
- Where does the money come from to support the site?
- Can you tell the advertisements from the health information? Are the ads clearly labeled?
Bias
- Some web pages have an inherent bias that will impact everything that appears on them.
- Is the author or sponsor:
  Left/liberal? Right/conservative? Center?
A political action group or association (PAC)?
Business?
Issue-oriented?

Page organization
- Is the page organized and focused?
- Is it well designed?
- Is the text well written?
- Are the links relevant and appropriate? Do the links work?
- Are the graphics clear in intent, relevant and professional looking?
- Do the graphics add to or enhance the content?

Currency
- When was the web page produced/revised?
- How up-to-date are the links?

Usefulness
- Is the website relevant to the research topic? Does it:
  Support an argument? Refute an argument?
  Provide examples?
  Provide "wrong" information that can be readily and productively challenged?
  Do the links work and have content?

Audience
- To what type of reader is the web page directed?
- Is it age appropriate for your needs?
- Is the page for
  General readers?
  Students (elementary, middle school, high school, college)?
  Specialists or professionals?
  Researchers or scholars?

Security
- Are security and/or encryption systems employed when necessary?
- Does the site ask for personal information?
- What will they do with the personal information? Check the privacy policy.

Source: Colorado State University Library, URL: http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/evalweb2.html