

**WASHTENAW COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BAILEY LIBRARY**

WEB SITE EVALUATION

With the explosion of information found on the web from various sources, searching the web for additional information is now part of everyone's research process. The Internet offers fast, easy access to full-text content. **But beware!** The web is unmonitored and unorganized. Not all information is created equal and not all websites are created equal.

The WCC librarians highly recommend that you begin your research with reliable articles and books to gain a solid background about your subject. With that knowledge, evaluating the web becomes much easier.

Remember, anyone with a little knowledge on how to design a web site can create content for the web. No one polices the web for "bad" information, e.g. no peer review, no editing, no review process at all. The web does not follow the strict publishing guidelines created by the publishers for print publications such as books, journal articles, documents, etc..

Also, remember that there is a lot of valuable information on the web. Be sure to visit the "Recommended Web Sites" for quality web sites recommended by librarians. For hot topics, check the list of websites compiled by our librarians at WCC. Go to www.wccnet.edu/resources/library.



Go with the strengths of the web

- [√] To obtain information on colleges, museums, non-profit organizations, or companies
- [√] To find very current information such as news, sports scores, weather, stock quotes
- [√] To research a well-known event or individual, literary and popular quotations, and lyrics
- [√] To find opinions on a topic
- [√] To find government information such as reports and statistics
- [√] To find images of artifacts, destinations, persons, events...



Stop and think! There are better places to look than the web

- [√] To search databases that index articles in many academic disciplines
- [√] To find books on your topic, search WCC's Library Catalog.
- [√] To find articles published in popular, professional, and scholarly journals use WCC Library's research databases.

HOW TO EVALUATE A WEB SITE

ACCURACY



How accurate is the information? Can you verify the information?

<http://147.129.226.1/library/research/AIDSFACTS.htm>

- How do you know if the information is accurate?



Does the website have an editor or author?



Is the site well written? Is it free of grammatical, spelling, and other typographical errors?



Does the website provide numerous references for support?

<http://www.ericdigests.org/1998-2/television.htm>

Analysis

- There are no standards for checking the accuracy of websites. Anyone can publish on the web.
- Unlike print sources, the web rarely has an editor or fact checker.

Example:

GENOCHOICE <http://www.genochoice.com> vs. Genetic Savings and Clone

<http://www.savingsandclone.com>

AUTHORITY



Is the author's name provided?

http://www.space.com/spacewatch/where_is_mars.html



If yes, does the website list the author's credentials?

<http://www.magicdragon.com/EmeraldCity/Nonfiction/socphil.html>



Is the author an expert on the subject? Can you contact the author or sponsor?

<http://www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html>



No author, who is the sponsor of the site?

<http://marsprogram.jpl.nasa.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/20050519a.html>

- An organization? A company?

Analysis

- Hard to believe, but most websites still do not provide an author.
- Even when you find an author's name, no credentials are provided.
- Sponsorship is not always given.

Hints:

Look at the About Us, FAQ, Philosophy, Background, Biography links

Look up the author in any search engine

Look at the domain name: .edu, .com, .gov, .org, .net provide clues about the website.

Examples:

Welcome to the White House www.whitehouse.gov vs. Welcome to the White House www.whitehouse.org

Children and Television Violence <http://www.abelard.org/tv/tv.htm> vs. Violence on Television <http://www.apa.org/pi/pii/vio&tv.html>

COVERAGE



Is the website complete or still under construction?

<http://www.iconarchive.com/construction/>



Does the website provide access to the complete document or just a summary?

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3099936.stm>



How in-depth is the material?

<http://www.geocities.com/lakemichiganwhales/?200514>

Analysis

- Sometimes, this is difficult to determine especially if you lack a background in the subject area.
- Copyright laws prevent web authors from posting the same material found in print journals and books for free.
- Websites can be designed just for fun!

Examples:

Studies Look at Child Care

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/11/01/news/childcare.php> vs. Influence of Preschool Centers http://pace.berkeley.edu/pace_publications.html

CURRENCY (DATE)

Currency, or date, refers to when the information was first printed. All print sources provide you with a date of publication. Again, not all websites provide you with a date. For some types of information, currency is not an issue: historical information. For many other types of data, however, currency is extremely important such as technology and medicine.



When was the website first created?

- Is the copyright date provided? <http://www.livingsmokefree.com/>



When was the website last updated?

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2X_Secondhand_Smoke-Clean_Indoor_Air.asp



Are the links on the website up-to-date and reliable? Are there any dead links?

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



Are there any other indicators that the material is kept current?

Analysis

- Every credible website includes the date that it was first created and the date of last update.
- Ask yourself, do I need more current information than what is being presented on the website?

OBJECTIVITY



Is the website free of advertising?

<http://home.ivillage.com/cooking/0,,8d47kvlg.00.html>



If there is advertising, is it related to the content?

<http://www.quit-smoking.net/smoking-statistics.html>



Does the author or sponsor have a bias? Is the author trying to sway your opinion? <http://www.beefnutrition.org/>

Analysis

- With the web, it is important to know who is providing the information so that you understand their point of view or bias.
- Corporate websites always present themselves in the most positive light.
- Information should always be accurate.

Examples:

National Cattlemen's Beef Association <http://www.beef.org/> vs. Mad Cow Disease Hits the United States <http://www.peta.org/feat/madcowus/>

Other:

Male Pregnancy <http://www.malepregancy.com>

Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster <http://www.venganza.org/>

In Summary

Look at the latest news about wikipedia.org (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) scandal about false information. Read "Wikipedia tightens rules after Kennedy flap." At <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10339204>