

Evaluating Information on the Net

While all information, whether found on the Net or in more traditional print sources, should be critically evaluated using the following basic criteria, the following questions are presented in the specific context of evaluating the "virtual" net sources.

1. Accuracy

- a. Is the information correct? Are sources for factual (statistics, etc.) information clearly stated so that it can be verified in other sources? Is the information you found similar to what you have found in other sources? It is best to use the rule of 3, "verify" accuracy of data by corroborating and confirming the information by trying to find three different sources (not Net sources) that agree with what you have found on the Net.
- b. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and other typographical errors?
- c. Is there evidence of a quality control process? Is the information merely an electronic posting of a book or journal article that probably has been through an editorial or peer review process? Is it clearly stated who is ultimately responsible for this information? Is the page signed? Is the page sponsored by an institution, association, company, etc.?

2. Authority

- a. What are the author's qualifications for writing on this subject? Are the author's credentials listed? Can this information be verified? Is the author speaking on behalf of an organization?
- b. Is it clearly stated what organization is sponsoring the page? Is there a postal address (an E-mail address is not enough) and phone number listed so that you can verify the legitimacy of the organization? Going to the HOME PAGE may help determine who may be the sponsoring agency. Is there a link to the sponsoring agency's home page? What are the purpose, goals, and mission of the sponsoring agency? Often the Internet address can give you clues about the nature or function of the sponsoring organization, e.g., .gov, .edu, .com, .org.
- c. Is the information copyrighted, if so, who is the holder of the copyright?

3. Objectivity

- a. Is the information presented with a minimum of bias? Pay attention to the language and writing style. Is the information presented in a formal academic manner? Is the overall tone of the article hostile, etc.? Is the language flagrant or exaggerated?
- b. What is the purpose of the web page, to inform, persuade, or to sell products? Who is the target audience of the page?
- c. Is the information free of advertising? If there is advertising, is it clearly distinguished from the information?
- d. Are both sides of the issue discussed or presented?
- e. Are opinions clearly discerned from "facts?"

4. Currency

- a. Are dates clearly stated for:
 - 1. When the information was written or copyrighted?
 - 2. When the page was first mounted on the Web?
 - 3. When the page was last revised?
- b. Are the links from the page current?
- c. Is the information "up to date?"

5. Coverage

- a. Is the page completed or "still under construction?"
- b. What topics are included? Are the topics superficially covered or treated in depth?

Based on your previous research, are there topics or significant information that is NOT included?

- c. Are there links to other sites?
- d. Is there a print equivalent? If so, is it clear as to if the entire work is included, or is the material abridged? Has it been edited? Is a complete bibliographic citation included for the print version?