Evaluating Internet Resources
Alfred C. O'Connell Library

Printed information resources such as books, magazines, journals and reference sources go through a series of "tests" before arriving in a library (e.g. editing, peer review, independent review, selection by librarians). Information sources (web pages, etc.) on the Internet are generally unfiltered. Anyone anywhere with a computer can create a web site about anything. So, it is important to critically evaluate the information you find on the Internet. Here are some things to consider:

Authority
- Who is the author/creator of the information? Can you tell?
- What do you know about the author? Can you tell what his/her education, occupation, training or experience is?
- Is the author impartial or biased about the topic? How do you know?
- Why would consider the author a reliable source of information about the topic you've searched?

Affiliation
- What institution (company, university, government, organization) is the information coming from?
- Is the institution commercial (profit-motivated, selling something)? Or educational? Or not-for-profit?
- How is the author/creator affiliated with this institution (employee, owner, official)? Would this bias the information he/she presents?

Currency
- When was the information which is presented created?
- When was the web page created? When was it most recently updated?
- Is the information's date appropriate for your topic?

Purpose
- Why do you think the institution created this web page?
  (To inform, to persuade, to promote?)
- Has the purpose of the web page influenced the content of the page?

Audience
- Who is the intended audience for this information? (Anyone, scholars, particular groups of people?)

Uniqueness
- Is this information unique? Or, are there other sources (other sites, printed sources, etc.) which provide the same information?
- Does this site have something special that makes it better than those other sources?

Conclusion
After considering all these questions, does the site seem appropriate for your needs?

- Genesee Community College -

EVALUATE SOURCES

Use the following criteria to help judge whether the materials you've collected will be suitable for your paper. It may be difficult in some cases to apply these criteria directly to every publication.

CREDIBILITY OF AUTHOR(S)
-Is information given about degrees, experience in the field?
-Is the author mentioned or cited in other sources you've examined?

DATE OF PUBLICATION
-The topic determines how recent your sources need to be, e.g., a topic from current events or in a rapidly changing field needs the most recent sources available. Older material may be suitable for historical or biographical topics.
-Books written within the last 5-10 years may be considered current; periodicals should be within the last 2-3 years to be considered current.
-Other criteria being equal, the more current, the better.

RELEVANCE OF PUBLICATION
-Does it relate directly to your topic?
-For books; skim title, preface, table of contents, index
-For periodical articles: look at subheadings, abstracts

INTENDED AUDIENCE
-"Popular" publications are written for the general public in easily understood language. Often they have no footnotes or bibliography. They can be useful but may oversimplify.
-"Scholarly" publications are written for an academic audience, usually by a specialist in the field. They may use technical terms and specialized vocabulary. They usually have extensive footnotes and bibliographies.
-Depending on your topic, either or both of these types of publications might be useful.

CONTENT
-Documentation: are opinions and facts supported by reference to other authorities or footnotes?
-If a controversial topic, are conflicting points of view acknowledged?
-Are emotional words and expressions used to sway the reader?
-Is the presentation logical and sensible?
-Point of view: is the material biased by the author's personal beliefs, and/or the general political or social climate?