

Evaluating Websites

A guide to helping students evaluate
websites used in their research.

by

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Introduction

Before you can evaluate a website, you must be able to perform an effective search.

There are three types of search engines.



Search Engines

- ❖ Subject directory search engines are compiled by humans and indexed to guide you to general areas that are then divided into specific categories.
- ❖ About.com
- ❖ Yahoo.com



Search Engines

- ❖ Robot driven search engines perform keyword searches by electronically scanning millions of web pages.
 - ❖ Altavista
 - ❖ Excite
 - ❖ Google



Search Engines

- ❖ Metasearch engines simultaneously query about ten major search engines and provide a short relevant list of results.
 - ❖ Dogpile
 - ❖ Momma.com
 - ❖ Metacrawler.com



Search Engines

There are also search engines for specific areas like government, political science, astronomy, computer technology, general science, health and medicine as well as many others.



The Evaluation Process

Before relying on the information found on a website,
examine the

- ❖ AUTHORITY
- ❖ ACCURACY
- ❖ VALIDITY
- ❖ COMPLETENESS
- ❖ CURRENCY

of the information on the site.



AUTHORITY

Questions

- ❖ Is it clear who wrote the material and are the author's qualifications for writing on this topic clearly stated?
- ❖ Is there a way to verify the legitimacy of the page's sponsor e.g., phone number or postal address?
- ❖ Can cross checks be made to verify that the authors and sponsors are genuine?



AUTHORITY

Clues

- ❖ Details about the author and sponsor
- ❖ Details about the origin of the data and information
- ❖ Contact information such as phone numbers and postal addresses for the author or sponsor.
- ❖ Email addresses which support claims of authorship



ACCURACY

Questions

- ❖ Is it clear who has the ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the content of the material?
- ❖ Are the sources of any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified in another source?
- ❖ Is the provider of the information likely to be well motivated to provide accurate information?



ACCURACY

Clues

- ❖ Typographical errors
- ❖ Spelling mistakes
- ❖ Bad grammar
- ❖ Bibliographies and references
- ❖ The credentials of the information provider



VALIDITY

Questions

- ❖ Does the source appear to be honest and genuine?
- ❖ Is the resource available in another format?
- ❖ Is the information well researched?
- ❖ Is any bias made clear and at an acceptable level?



VALIDITY

Clues

- ❖ References and bibliographies
- ❖ Statement of the source of the information
- ❖ Statement of the objectives of the site
- ❖ Mention of any quality checks the information passes through
- ❖ URL that supports the claims of the content



URL

- ❖ .gov Government agency: www.whitehouse.gov
- ❖ .net Internet Service Provider: www.whitehouse.net
- ❖ .com Commercial site
- ❖ .edu Higher education - www.lesley.edu.
- ❖ .mil Military site- www.navy.mil/
- ❖ .org Organization; may be charitable, religious, or a lobbying group - <http://www.rtda.org>.
- ❖ ~("tilde") Personal site - www.ddc.com/~kjohnson/birdcare.htm
- ❖ Country names appear as a two-letter abbreviation in the domain name.
- ❖ State agencies and K-12 schools end in la.us.
- ❖ British educational institutions end in ac.uk.



COMPLETENESS

Questions

- ❖ Is the resource available in full, not “under construction”?
- ❖ Is the resource available in full text?
- ❖ Are there any dead links or empty files?
- ❖ Does the information available agree with the promises made?



COMPLETENESS

Clues

- ❖ Any scope statement for the site
- ❖ Content pages
- ❖ Grayed out or not yet live links
- ❖ Site maps



CURRENCY

Questions

- ❖ Is the information on the page up-to-date?
- ❖ Are there any indicators that the page has been kept current?



CURRENCY

Clues

- ❖ Date the page was written
- ❖ Date the page was placed on the web
- ❖ Date the page was last revised
- ❖ Copyright dates
- ❖ Dead links

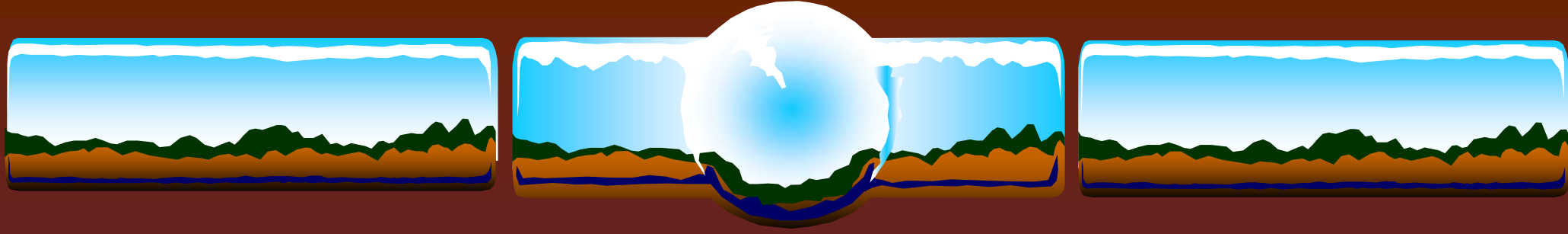


Conclusion

When evaluating a web site, examine the

- ❖ AUTHORITY
- ❖ ACCURACY
- ❖ VALIDITY
- ❖ COMPLETENESS
- ❖ CURRENCY

of the web site before relying on the information from that site.



The End

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