



GETTING CONNECTED

TO INTERNET RESOURCES

EVALUATING RESULTS

Not all sources of information are equally valuable or reliable, whether in print or on the Internet. As you assemble information to use for a research paper or report, you should be evaluating what you find. Examine your sources with a critical eye. Know what you are using and why.

Keep in mind that anybody can have a web page. Personal web pages can be interesting or amusing, but their value as research information sources is debatable. The criteria listed below can be used to judge any resource, but they're especially important when trying to evaluate information on the Internet.

AUTHORITY

The authority of a work is the author's (or editor's) level of knowledge, experience, training, etc. in that work's subject area. It can be a good indicator of the reliability of the information presented.

- Is it clear who authored or is sponsoring the page?
- Is there a link to a page describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization?
- Is there a way to verify the legitimacy of the page's sponsor? An email address by itself is not enough. Is there a phone number or postal address to contact for more information?
- Is it clear who wrote the material? Are the author's qualifications for writing on this topic clearly stated?
- If the material is protected by copyright, is the name of the copyright holder given?

ACCURACY

- Are the sources for any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified in another source?
- Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and other typographical errors? (These kinds of errors not only indicate a lack of quality control, but can actually produce inaccuracies in information).
- If statistical data is presented in graphs and/or charts, are they clearly labeled and easy to read?

OBJECTIVITY

Both the author's qualifications and personal point of view may affect the objectivity of a source. If the page is sponsored by a particular political or religious group, the materials that they produce may reflect that group's attitudes or beliefs. You need to be able to distinguish fact from opinion. There are certainly times when you want differing point of view, but if you are after facts, you probably want to get them from an expert.

- Is the information provided as a public service?
- Is the information free of advertising? If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly differentiated from informational content?

CURRENCY

The recency of information contained in a source may be of importance, depending on your topic. Contemporary information is created soon after an event; retrospective information is produced some time afterwards. Contemporary information can indicate what people thought or felt about a person or event at that time; more recently-produced works can show how knowledge and opinions have changed in the intervening years.

- Are there dates on the page to indicate: when the page was written? When it was first placed on the Internet? When it was last revised?
- If material is presented in graphs and/or charts, is it clearly stated when the data was gathered?
- If the information is published in different editions, is the edition of the page you are using clearly labeled?

COVERAGE

- Can you tell if the web site has been completed, or is still under construction?
- If there is a print equivalent to the Web page, is there a clear indication of whether the entire work is available on the Web or only parts of it?
- If the material is from a work which is out of copyright (as is often the case with a dictionary or thesaurus) is the date clearly indicated? Is there a referral or link to a more current edition?