

Criteria for Examining the Credibility of Information on the Internet

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Authority

| Definition | Questions to Ask | Clues to Look For |
|---|---|---|
| Author or sponsor of the site. Qualifications and reputation of the author/source. The authority and reputation of the source of the information will depend on the expertise, reputation and status of the source. | Is there an author? Is the page signed? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A header or footer stating authorship or an e-mail/postal address |
| | Is the author qualified and/or reputable? An expert? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author's credentials • Information you find about the author through other searches or databases |
| | Who is the sponsor? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship statement • An "about" link |
| | Is the sponsor of the page reputable? How reputable? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A link with information about the author or the sponsor • Who links to the site you are evaluating? (Go to www.altavista.com, type in the search window: link:all or part of the URL. Check out http://www.altavista.com/sites/help/adv_search/syntax for more information about this feature) |
| | If the page includes neither a signature nor a sponsor, is there another way to determine its origin? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An "about" link • The URL • The domain and country codes • Try a "who is" search (Go to www.networksolutions.com/en_US/whois/index.jhtml). |
| | Are there links that take you outside of the site? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frames, URLs different from the current site • Try opening each link in a new page to see the true URL (hold down the SHIFT key while you click each link) |

Accuracy

| Definition | Questions to Ask | Clues to Look For |
|--|---|--|
| Reliable and error-free information. Conformity to fact. Precision; exactness. | Is the information reliable and error-free? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typographical errors, spelling mistakes, bad grammar • Credentials of the information provider |
| | Is there an editor or someone who verifies/checks the information? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information part of a larger publication? • Can you find the home page and access editorial information? |
| | Where doubt exists, can the information be crosschecked with a reliable source? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bibliographies, references • Verification with established, reliable sources |

Objectivity

| Definition | Questions to Ask | Clues to Look For |
|---|--|--|
| Judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices. | Does the information show a minimum of bias? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who links to this site? (Go to www.altavista.com, type in the search window: link:all or part of the URL.) |
| | Is the page designed to sway opinion? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A statement of the aims and objectives of the site (often in the "about this site" section) |
| | Is there any advertising on the page? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertising banners Links to commercial sites selling products/services |

Currency

| Definition | Questions to Ask | Clues to Look For |
|--|---|---|
| Belonging to the present time, being in progress now: current negotiations, prevalent, especially at the present time. | Is the page dated? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date on page (often at bottom of page, news articles may have the date at the top of the article) |
| | If so, when was the last update? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the date when the material was first written, first placed on the web, or the date when it was last revised? Type this code in the address bar of a webpage to find the date it was last updated: javascript:alert(document.lastModified) <p>NOTE: sometimes pages are set to give the current date when this script is used</p> |
| | How current are the links? Have some expired or moved? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Click links to pages inside and outside of the site. Do they work? |

Coverage

| Definition | Questions to Ask | Clues to Look For |
|--|---|--|
| The extent or degree to which something is observed, analyzed, and reported. | Is there an indication that the page has been completed, and is not still under construction? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Construction" signs Non-functioning links |
| | 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? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the date when the material was first written, first placed on the web, or the date when it was last revised? |
| | What topics are covered? How in-depth is the material? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An index A site map |