Evaluating Information

Consider the main purpose of the source. Ask yourself the following questions no matter where you find information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Domain (often)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>influence public opinion, sell ideas</td>
<td>.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Marketing</td>
<td>sell or promote products</td>
<td>.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>provide extremely current information</td>
<td>.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>present factual information</td>
<td>.edu or .gov</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criterion #1: AUTHORITY
1. Is it clear who (organization, institution, or person) is responsible for the contents of the page?
2. Is there a link to a page describing the goals of the organization, the nature of the company, or purpose of the sponsor?
3. Is there a way of verifying the legitimacy of the sponsor? That is, is there a phone number or postal address to contact for more information? (Simply an email address is not enough.)
4. Is there a statement that the content of the page has the official approval of the sponsor?
5. Is it clear whether this is a page from the main sponsor?
6. Is there a statement giving the sponsor's name as copyright holder?

Criterion #2: ACCURACY
1. Are the sources for any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified in another source? (If not, the page may still be useful to you as an example of the ideas of the organization, but it is not useful as a source of factual information).
2. Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and typographical errors? (These kinds of errors not only indicate a lack of quality control, but can actually produce inaccuracies in information.)

Criterion #3: OBJECTIVITY
1. Are the sponsor's biases clearly stated?
2. If there is any advertising on the page, is it clearly differentiated from the informational content?

Criterion #4: CURRENCY
1. Are there dates on the page to indicate:
   a. When the page was written?
   b. When the page was first placed on the Web?
   c. When the page was last revised?
2. Are there any other indications that the material is kept current?

Criterion #5: COVERAGE
1. Is there an indication that the page has been completed, and is not still under construction?
2. Is it clear what topics the page intends to address?
3. Does the page succeed in addressing these topics, or has something significant been left out?
4. Is the point of view of the sponsor presented in a clear manner with its arguments well supported?

This checklist was taken from “Evaluating Web Resources” [no longer available in that form] Jan Alexander & Marsha Ann Tate 1996-1999. The checklist has developed into “Evaluate Web Pages” Widener University (accessed March 30, 2006).