

## EVALUATING WEB INFORMATION

Information comes to us from a wide variety of sources.  
Can you tell good information from bad?

Here are some things to remember when you use the Web:

- ANYONE can publish on the Web! Will you be able to distinguish between John Hopkins the 7th grader and Johns Hopkins University?
- Most of the Library's subscription-based periodical databases are available from the Library's web site and can be accessed from your dorm room. You can bet that there will be a much higher percentage of useful information from these resources than from the Web. This is mainly because most articles must be critiqued and evaluated by scholars and editors before publication, which ensures that the information you receive is accurate and useful. Scholarly articles are rarely available for free on the Web.

We offer you the following information for use when looking for quality information on the Web.

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>How can I tell?</b>
<b>Authority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the page signed?</li> <li>✓ Are the author's qualifications available?</li> <li>✓ Does s/he have expertise in this subject?</li> <li>✓ Is the author associated with an educational institution or other reputable organization?</li> <li>✓ Does the publisher or publication have a reputation for reliability?</li> <li>✓ Is contact information for the author or group available on the site?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's often hard to determine a web page's authorship.</li> <li>• Unlike traditional print resources, Web resources rarely have editors or fact-checkers.</li> <li>• There are no standards for information on the web, which would ensure that all information there is accurate and useful.</li> <li>• People create web pages for different reasons:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personal</li> <li>○ Advocacy</li> <li>○ Commercial/Marketing</li> <li>○ Informational</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at the top and bottom of the web page for clues.</li> <li>• Is there a link to a main web site for the group/educational institution/organization hosting this web page?</li> <li>• Look at the first part of the URL for the web page. Is it .org? .edu? .gov? .net? .com?</li> <li>• Does the author or host have a web page explaining who they are and what their mission or philosophy is?</li> <li>• Ask a Reference Librarian if information about the publisher is available</li> </ul>
<b>Coverage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the information even relevant to your topic?</li> <li>✓ Do you think it is useful to you?</li> <li>✓ Does this page have information that is not found elsewhere?</li> <li>✓ How in-depth is the material?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web coverage often differs from print coverage.</li> <li>• Frequently it's difficult to determine the extent of coverage.</li> <li>• Sometimes web information is just-for-fun or outright</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read through/scan the web page and consider.</li> <li>• Ask a Reference Librarian if the information you have found can be verified elsewhere.</li> </ul>

		silliness.	
<b>Objectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Does the information show a minimum of bias?</li> <li>✓ Is the page a presentation of facts and not designed to sway opinion?</li> <li>✓ Is the page free of advertisements or sponsored links?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently the goals of the sponsors/authors aren't clearly stated.</li> <li>• Often the Web serves as a virtual soapbox, a place to voice their opinion.</li> <li>• An advertiser or organization may influence the content of the page.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read through/scan the web page and consider.</li> <li>• Does the author or host have a web page explaining who they are and what their mission or philosophy is?</li> <li>• Ask a Reference Librarian if information about the author/company/organization is available.</li> </ul>
<b>Accuracy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the information reliable and error-free?</li> <li>✓ Can you find when was the last update?</li> <li>✓ Is there an editor or someone who verifies/checks the information?</li> <li>✓ Is the page free of spelling mistakes or other obvious problems?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Anyone</i> can publish <i>anything</i> on the Web.</li> <li>• Unlike traditional print resources, Web resources rarely have editors or fact-checkers.</li> <li>• Currently, no Web standards exist to ensure accuracy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read through/scan the Web page and consider.</li> <li>• Ask a Reference Librarian if the information you have found can be verified elsewhere.</li> </ul>
<b>Currency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the page dated?</li> <li>✓ Can you find when was the last update?</li> <li>✓ Are the links current and do they point to existing pages?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication or revision dates are not always provided.</li> <li>• Pages with broken links may not be updated regularly.</li> <li>• If a date is provided, it may have various meanings. For example it may indicate when the material: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ was first written</li> <li>○ was first placed on the Web</li> <li>○ was last updated</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read through and scan the text to see if the author attributes information/facts to a particular year. e.g. "in 1997, 35 car accidents were caused by chickens crossing the road.</li> <li>• Scan through the bibliography or list of references (be concerned if there isn't one!) and see how current each item is. e.g. Cool, Joe. (1975) "Current flying practices." <i>Canine Aviation</i> 32(3):23-40.</li> <li>• Look at the footer to see if the author has included a date, and what that date means.</li> </ul>

Source: Virginia Tech University Libraries. "Evaluating Web Information." <http://www.lib.vt.edu/research/evaluate/evaluating.html> [Accessed 2/20/04]

If you have any questions, please ask.  
A reference librarian can help you determine the validity of a web site.  
**Stop by, call 594-7132, or email: [library@cnu.edu](mailto:library@cnu.edu)**