



CBC Learning Resource Center & Library

Evaluating Internet Resources

The World Wide Web is a vast resource of *useful* and *useless* material. Because of its design, anyone can create content for publication on it. The Coastal Bend College Libraries has purchased vendor resources that are authentic and authoritative. However, it is recognized that you may find good resources on the internet, many of them published by other libraries and educational institutions. This quick guide will help you decide whether they are worthy of inclusion in your writing.

Authorship

Check the main web page for a stated author. This will either be at the main web page, or on an "About" page or a "Contact Us" page. The main web page of a web site usually ends with a /index.htm. Good web designers will also have a person or office to contact. Private web pages (ending in a .com or .net) should have a person's name and email listed.

Affiliation

Web site URL's that end in .edu or .gov will belong to a public educational institution or government. Web sites that end in .org should be a non-profit institution, but check for other indications of authorship. Web sites that end in .com, .biz, or .net are created by individuals or companies, and may be solely in the business of making money or spreading a personal viewpoint. This includes weblogs (blogs) and news sites.

Currency

Good web page designers will have a copyright notice with a current year(s) (2008-2012), or a "last updated" date at the bottom of the page. Whether the whole site is up to date or just individual sub-pages, good web sites will have dates placed in obvious places.

Purpose

Check for statements of purpose, mission statements, etc on the web site. Does it want to inform, explain or persuade?

Content

Read the pages of the web site to find out if the content on the site is satirical, scholarly, infotainment, or the presentation of research. Does the web site quote reliable, well-known sources like *The New York Times* or other more scholarly journals, books, and newspapers? Look for the same things you would in a research paper like a bibliography and proper use of citations. Private web sites frequently contain information from journals, or host on-line journals. How much advertising does it have? Although most .com web pages have some advertising, many of those are also worthy of a second look (such as a newspaper web site).

Citation

All style guides contain guidelines for quoting and citing information obtained from the internet. They are available from the library or through the library's web page.

Final comments

Whether or not to use material from a web site is up to you and/or your instructor. Many good web sites will be based on a bias or particular point of view. However, well-designed web sites will be up front regarding authorship, content, and purpose, meaning that it should be easy to verify the information listed. It is up to the student to decide whether the information meets the needs of his/her writing.

The Cornell University Library provides an extensive tutorial for evaluating web sites:

Critically Analyzing Information Sources: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm> The Seven Steps of the Research Process: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill1.htm>

Updated 2/14/2012- JJ- Coastal Bend College LRC phone numbers: Beeville – 361.354.2737; Alice – 361.664.2737 x 3063; Kingsville – 361.592.1615 x 4084. On the web lrc.coastalbend.edu

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