EVALUATING INTERNET RESOURCES

IS THE INTERNET FUN? YES. IS THE INTERNET A GOOD TOOL FOR RESEARCH? YES, BUT……..

Freedom of publication in cyberspace is what makes the Internet such a wonderful and powerful resource – any person, any group, any organization can publish whatever they want on the web. Your search results may have widely varying degrees of quality, reliability, validity.

Use the following questions to critically evaluate websites to ensure that they are suitable for your research.

PURPOSE
1. Is the purpose clearly stated?
2. Is the Web page trying to inform, persuade, explain or sell something?
3. Who is the intended audience – subject experts, general public, or school students?

AUTHOR
1. Is the author identifiable?
2. Are his/her credentials (education, training, experience, position, title) listed?
3. What institution or organization is the person affiliated with?
4. Is there a way to contact the author?
5. Is he or she speaking for him/herself or as an official representative? Note difference:
   a. “Brian Jones, employee of the Food & Drug Administration, says that sugar cures obesity,”
   b. “The Food & Drug Administration said today, according to spokesperson Brian Jones, that sugar cures obesity.”

SOURCE
1. If the source is an association or organization, is it known and respected?
2. Check the domain name in the URL – usually a good clue about source and reliability (see #3)
   .edu = educational organization
   .org = non-profit organization
   .net = network related
   .info = general use
   .museum = museums
   .coop = cooperatives
   .name = individuals
   .com = commercial organization
   .gov = governmental organization
   .mil = U.S. military
   .biz = business
   .aero = air-transport industry
   .pro = professions
   two-letter code = country (ex.: uk = United Kingdom)
3. Can’t always judge by domain because
   a. commercial sites may be selling something
   b. educational sites range from forums for sophomoric humor to cutting edge research
   c. non-profits may be professional associations or frivolous groups, etc.
**ACCURACY**
1. Is the text well written or does it contain misspellings and bad grammar?
2. Does the information compare with the other information you've found?
   a. Are assumptions and arguments supported by the data?
3. Is the information comprehensive?
   a. Does it just cover one aspect of a topic or all aspects of it?
   b. How deep does it get?
4. Are sources of information clearly stated, whether original or borrowed from elsewhere?
5. Are all links relevant and appropriate? Do they work?

**CURRENCY**
1. When was the site last revised?
   a. If date is not evident on webpage, check tabs/links on page
   b. Avoid site if date not located or if it is an old date on information known to change quickly.
2. How frequently is the resource updated or is it a static resource?
   a. Some work is timeless like classic novels or the philosophical works of Plato.
   b. Some work has limited useful life because of advances within its field (ex.: nursing).
3. Does the site contain clearly dated information such as “1990 U.S. Census”?

**COVERAGE**
1. Does the information cover a broad topic or focus on just one aspect?
2. Does the web site cover a wide time frame, only historical information, or only cutting edge events?
3. Is the purpose of the page to inform, explain, persuade, market a product or advocate a cause?

**OBJECTIVITY**
1. Is the information fact or opinion?
   a. Every writer has an opinion and wants to prove his point.
   b. Fact can be proven and verified by other documents or witnesses.
2. Is the information reasonable and balanced?
   a. Some authors provide objective coverage of a topic. Others attempt to sway you to their opinion by providing slanted or biased information.
   b. Is information presented without any political, ideological, cultural, religious or institutional bias?
   c. Watch out for ambiguity (double meanings, puns), innuendo, manipulative reasoning, exaggeration, and intemperate tone or language (“stupid jerks”, “shrill cries of their extremist opponents”).
3. Does the writer maintain his objectivity?
   a. The information should never contradict itself nor should it contain any fallacies or conflicts of interest.