Evaluating Web Sites

Why is it necessary to evaluate web sites found on the open Internet?
The open Internet contains many different types of information. Some of it is appropriate for academic use and some of it is not. By following these guidelines, students should be able to determine fact from CRAAP.

Steps for Evaluating Web Sites:
I. Currency
II. Relevance
III. Authority
IV. Accuracy
V. Purpose and ease of use

I. Currency
When evaluating a document, currency is an important issue for some research.

A. What is the topic of the web site and is it one where currency is of importance? For example, historical documents may not have to be updated as would medical research.

B. When was the web site last revised, modified, or updated? There should be a place on the web site where the date of last revision is posted.

II. Relevance
Relevance is important for academic research, too.

A. Does this document answer some part of my research question?

B. Does this document meet the assignment’s requirements?

C. Is the information in this document appropriate for your research assignment?

III. Authority
In order to evaluate an article’s validity, ask who wrote it and where was the article published.

A. Who wrote this? Ask if the author or organization has authority on this topic. (i.e. The American Cancer Society on cancer)

B. Why should people believe this author? Does this author actually know anything about this subject?

There are two ways that people learn about a certain topic.

1. Paper Credentials—diplomas, degrees, certifications, etc.

2. Hands On Experience—Caution--some sources are solely the author’s opinion and should be avoided in academic research.

C. Where does it come from? Is document from a quality source? (i.e. New England Journal of Medicine, Newsweek, etc.)

D. What is the domain? Does the URL reveal anything about the source? (.gov, .mil, .edu, .org, .com)

IV. Accuracy
Accuracy pertains to the reliability of the information in the document.

A. Does the site provide subjective, objective, or balanced information?

B. Is the information supported with research?

C. Has the document been reviewed by subject area experts?

D. Are there spelling, grammar, and/or other errors in the information?

V. Purpose
Another factor to consider is the purpose of the web site.

A. Does the web site state its purpose? Look to the title and headings to determine why the web site was created. Mission statements and tabs can give insight.

B. What is its purpose? Is the purpose to provide research and scholarly information? To provide educational or factual information? To entertain? To advertise, market or sell something? To advocate ideas? To persuade you?

In conclusion, examine and evaluate your research to see if it passes the CRAAP test!

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