

The Good, The Bad & The Ugly: or, Why It's a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources Evaluation Criteria

I. Authority

- Is there an author? Is the page signed?
- Is the author qualified? An expert?
- Who is the sponsor?
- Is the sponsor of the page reputable? How reputable?
- Is there a link to information about the author or the sponsor?
- If the page includes neither a signature nor indicates a sponsor, is there any other way to determine its origin?

Look for a header or footer showing affiliation.
Look at the URL. *http://www.fbi.gov*
Look at the domain. *.edu, .com, .ac.uk, .org, .net*

Rationale

1. Anyone can publish anything on the web.
2. It is often hard to determine a web page's authorship.
3. Even if a page is signed, qualifications are not usually provided.
4. Sponsorship is not always indicated.

II. Accuracy

- Is the information reliable and error-free?
- Is there an editor or someone who verifies/checks the information?

Rationale

1. See number 1 above
2. Unlike traditional print resources, web resources rarely have editors or fact-checkers.
3. Currently, no web standards exist to ensure accuracy.

III. Objectivity

- Does the information show a minimum of bias?
- Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- Is there any advertising on the page?

Rationale

1. Frequently the goals of the sponsors/authors are not clearly stated.
2. Often the Web serves as a virtual "Hyde Park Corner", a soapbox.

IV. Currency

- Is the page dated?
- If so, when was the last update?
- How current are the links? Have some expired or moved?

Rationale

1. Publication or revision dates are not always provided.
2. If a date is provided, it may have various meanings. For example,

It may indicate when the material was first written

It may indicate when the material was first placed on the Web

It may indicate when the material was last revised

V. Coverage

- What topics are covered?
- What does this page offer that is not found elsewhere?
- What is its intrinsic value?
- How in-depth is the material?

Rationale

1. Web coverage often differs from print coverage.
2. Frequently, it's difficult to determine the extent of coverage of a topic from a web page. The page may or may not include links to other web pages or print references.
3. Sometimes web information is "just for fun", a hoax, someone's personal expression that may be of interest to no one, or even outright silliness.