

## Evaluating Web Sites

### First Impression of the Overall Package

When using the Internet for research it is incredibly important to evaluate the information sources/web sites that are found. As one comes across various web sites some initial considerations must be made of the value of the site. Some questions to ask yourself may include:

#### What kind of information is being presented?

- Is the mission or purpose of the web site clearly stated and if so does the content reflect the mission or purpose?
- Who is the intended audience, serious researchers or folks out cruising the web for entertainment?
- How extensive is the site, does it offer features such as email, discussion lists or chat rooms?

In addition to the above mentioned criteria, consider the following when choosing a web site for research:

- Advertising, an abundance may deter from research and infer a lack of educational intent
- Must one register or pay a fee to use this site?
- Is the coverage of the topic sufficient to meet the needs of the user?

### Closer Look – Authority & Control

Upon closer inspection of a web site, it is vital to determine where, and from whom the information is coming. Authority is probably the most important criteria to determine. Make sure that the following questions can be answered before relying on the information provided.

- Is the author or sponsor an individual, non-profit organization, governmental agency or commercial enterprise?
- Does the author have an affiliation with an institution or commercial enterprise, and is this association clearly stated?
- Are the author's credentials provided?
- Is an email address given?

Currency is an important issue in web research as well. When the site was last updated should be indicated. Is a copyright date provided? Does the information reflect the current trends of the subject covered?

### Critical Inspection

Once authoritative validity has been established, take a closer look at the reasonableness of the content. Be skeptical about why the source should be trusted. Look for information portrayed as objectively as possible. Some criteria for objectivity include:

- Balance, are both sides of a viewpoint evident or is there an obvious bias?
- If there is a bias, is it clearly stated?
- Is the author making vague or sweeping generalizations?
- Is strong language being used to convey messages?
- How is the quality control; are there very many misspelled words or grammatical errors present?

Another very important point to consider is whether or not the author provides support for the information presented. Where does the information come from? Are sources cited?

## **Presentation**

Last on the list to be evaluated is the actual presentation and navigation of the web site. While good information is simply good information, a visually appealing site that is easy to navigate makes the research processes easier. Points to look for include:

- Is the use of color appealing?
- Are pictures and graphics presented in a logical and orderly fashion?
- How is the readability of the text?
- Is there a standard format from screen to screen?
- Are there navigational tools on each screen?
- Is the site easy to navigate?
- Does the site support a wide variety of user capabilities including a user's browser and Internet savvy?
- Is there a help function and how helpful is it?