How to Evaluate Sources

In one of the many tutorials, "What's Good on the Web?", there is a list of four types of web sites generally considered to be good places to get information. They are:

1. **Company Web sites**--Information on products, services, staff, and the general organizational structure of the company.

2. **Government Web sites**--Information on almost anything! U.S. government produces tremendous amounts of information in a variety of areas.

3. **Organization Web sites**--Information on the issues an organization advocates and the general organizational structure of the organization.

4. **Statistical Web sites**--Statistical information and data sets from government and academic pages.

But what happens when you venture off into other places on the Wild Wild Web?

Answer: You take these evaluation skills with you and apply them. This list also comes from one of UMUC's online library tutorials--"Evaluating Internet Resources".

Your assignment for this thread: Find a WWW site related to your topic, then evaluate it using these criteria. Post your review of the site to this thread. Use the following criteria to evaluate the site.

Criterion #1: Authority

- Is it clear who is sponsoring the creation and maintenance of the page?
- Is there information available describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization?
- Is there a way of verifying the legitimacy of the page's sponsor? For instance, is a phone number or address available to contact for more information?
- Is it clear who developed and wrote the material? Are his/her qualifications for writing on this topic clearly stated? Is there contact information for the author of the material?

Criterion #2: Accuracy

- Are the sources for factual information given so they can be verified?
- Is it clear who has the responsibility for the accuracy of the information presented?
- If statistical data is presented in graphs or charts, are they labeled clearly?
- Are there errors you can substantiate in the data presented?

Criterion #3: Objectivity

- Is the page and the information included provided as a public service?
- Is it free of advertising?
- If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly separated from the informational content?
- Are there any other signs of bias?

Criterion #4: Currency

Are there dates on the page to indicate the following:

- When the page was written?
- When the page was first placed on line?
- When the page was last revised or edited?
- Are there any other indications that the material is updated frequently to ensure currency of the data?
- If the information is published in print in different editions, is it clear what edition the page is from?
- Are the links on the page up-to-date?

Criterion #5: Coverage

- Is there an indication that the page has been completed and is not still under construction?
- If there is a print equivalent to the Web page, is there clear indication of whether the entire work or only a portion of it is available on the Web?
- If the material is from a work that is out of copyright (as is often the case with a dictionary or thesaurus), has there been an effort to update the material to make it more current?
- Is there any other evidence of omissions?
- Does it cover the subject adequately?

Instant Web Savvy

The Internet offers unprecedented access to remarkably rich and extensive information. All you have to do is find it. That's why one of my favorite online resources is Barbara Friedman's *Web Search Savvy* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004). But, of course, web savvy folks can read it for free on Questia.com.

Before beginning your hardcore research for your final project, I encourage you to take a quick read of two sections of Friedman's book: Appendix C: Useful Web Sites. These are links to information portals that are excellent places to begin your data searches.

The other is her chapter on [When Seconds Count: Search Engine Strategies](). I'm sure most of you can skip the first section on search basics and go straight to "The Advanced Search," "Boolean Expression: The Web's Best Kept Secret," and other great tips.

Note: If the correct book section does not appear upon clicking the links above, use the nav bar on the left side of the screen to link directly to the book's chapters.

Good luck!