

# Evaluating Websites

A guide to helping students evaluate  
websites used in their research.

by

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# Introduction

Before you can evaluate a website, you must be able to perform an effective search.

There are three types of search engines.



# Search Engines

- ❖ Subject directory search engines are compiled by humans and indexed to guide you to general areas that are then divided into specific categories.
  - ❖ About.com
  - ❖ Yahoo.com



# Search Engines

- ❖ Robot driven search engines perform keyword searches by electronically scanning millions of web pages.
  - ❖ Altavista
  - ❖ Excite
  - ❖ Google



# Search Engines

- ❖ Metasearch engines simultaneously query about ten major search engines and provide a short relevant list of results.
  - ❖ Dogpile
  - ❖ Momma.com
  - ❖ Metacrawler.com



# Search Engines

There are also search engines for specific areas like government, political science, astronomy, computer technology, general science, health and medicine as well as many others.



# The Evaluation Process

Before relying on the information found on a website,  
examine the

- ❖ AUTHORITY
- ❖ ACCURACY
- ❖ VALIDITY
- ❖ COMPLETENESS
- ❖ CURRENCY

of the information on the site.



# AUTHORITY

## Questions

- ❖ Is it clear who wrote the material and are the author's qualifications for writing on this topic clearly stated?
- ❖ Is there a way to verify the legitimacy of the page's sponsor e.g., phone number or postal address?
- ❖ Can cross checks be made to verify that the authors and sponsors are genuine?



# AUTHORITY

## Clues

- ❖ Details about the author and sponsor
- ❖ Details about the origin of the data and information
- ❖ Contact information such as phone numbers and postal addresses for the author or sponsor.
- ❖ Email addresses which support claims of authorship



# ACCURACY

## Questions

- ❖ Is it clear who has the ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of the content of the material?
- ❖ Are the sources of any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified in another source?
- ❖ Is the provider of the information likely to be well motivated to provide accurate information?



# ACCURACY

## Clues

- ❖ Typographical errors
- ❖ Spelling mistakes
- ❖ Bad grammar
- ❖ Bibliographies and references
- ❖ The credentials of the information provider



# VALIDITY

## Questions

- ❖ Does the source appear to be honest and genuine?
- ❖ Is the resource available in another format?
- ❖ Is the information well researched?
- ❖ Is any bias made clear and at an acceptable level?



# VALIDITY

## Clues

- ❖ References and bibliographies
- ❖ Statement of the source of the information
- ❖ Statement of the objectives of the site
- ❖ Mention of any quality checks the information passes through
- ❖ URL that supports the claims of the content



# URL

- ❖ .gov Government agency: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)
- ❖ .net Internet Service Provider: [www.whitehouse.net](http://www.whitehouse.net)
- ❖ .com Commercial site
- ❖ .edu Higher education - [www.lesley.edu](http://www.lesley.edu).
- ❖ .mil Military site- [www.navy.mil/](http://www.navy.mil/)
- ❖ .org Organization; may be charitable, religious, or a lobbying group - <http://www.rtda.org>.
- ❖ ~("tilde") Personal site - [www.ddc.com/~kjohnson/birdcare.htm](http://www.ddc.com/~kjohnson/birdcare.htm)
  
- ❖ Country names appear as a two-letter abbreviation in the domain name.
- ❖ State agencies and K-12 schools end in la.us.
- ❖ British educational institutions end in ac.uk.



# COMPLETENESS

## Questions

- ❖ Is the resource available in full, not “under construction”?
- ❖ Is the resource available in full text?
- ❖ Are there any dead links or empty files?
- ❖ Does the information available agree with the promises made?



# COMPLETENESS

## Clues

- ❖ Any scope statement for the site
- ❖ Content pages
- ❖ Grayed out or not yet live links
- ❖ Site maps



# CURRENCY

## Questions

- ❖ Is the information on the page up-to-date?
- ❖ Are there any indicators that the page has been kept current?



# CURRENCY

## Clues

- ❖ Date the page was written
- ❖ Date the page was placed on the web
- ❖ Date the page was last revised
- ❖ Copyright dates
- ❖ Dead links

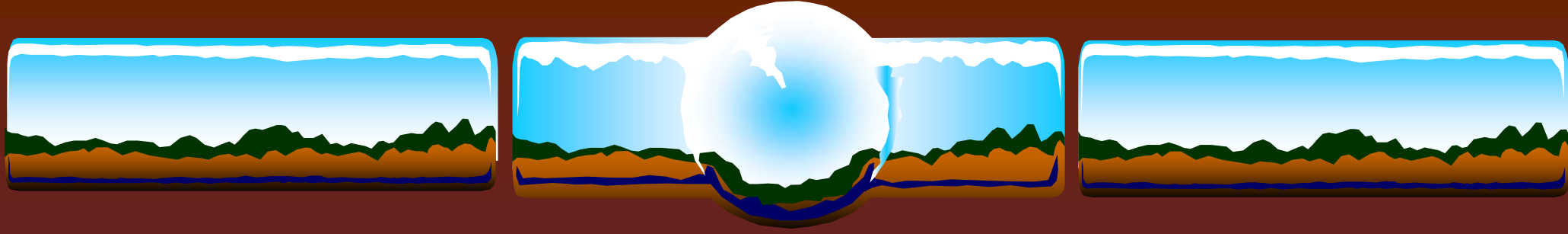


# Conclusion

When evaluating a web site, examine the

- ❖ AUTHORITY
- ❖ ACCURACY
- ❖ VALIDITY
- ❖ COMPLETENESS
- ❖ CURRENCY

of the web site before relying on the information from that site.



The End

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