Evaluating Information Is Not Always Easy

- Evaluating information is not always easy, especially when you find it on the Internet.
  - There is a lot of “garbage” available on the Internet with no one reviewing its content.
  - There is very little stopping anyone from publishing whatever they want on the Internet.
  - The rankings that search engines give to various sites reflect their popularity, but not always their accuracy.

Source – Bob Baker (Pima Community College)
Info Literacy 10. Evaluating Information Sources
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVvNhN3_es_8
Authority

• Authority deals with the ability of the author to speak knowledgably about the subject at hand.
• Evaluating the authority of an author of a web page can be difficult unless you either the author or can research his/her background.
• It is easy to evaluate the authority of authors of more traditional sources (book, newspapers, magazines, journals, references sources such as traditional encyclopedias) because of editorial control.

Is It Authoritative?

• Articles appearing in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal or reputable reference or trade publisher can generally be published.
• Corporate, educational or government web sites do not have author names, but generally will provide trustworthy information.
Evaluating the Author

- In many cases, you can find the name of the author on a web page and it may lead you to information about the author, such as educational credentials.
- In other cases, you can look elsewhere to find out about the author, such as a library database, which may list his/her publications.

Is the Web Site Authoritative?

- Examining the domain name:
  - Web sites whose URL (web address) ends with .edu indicate an educational institution and increase the chance that the information is reliable.
Timeliness (or Currency)

- Writing on a current topic requires current information.
- Materials in traditional sources (books and periodicals) are typically 6 months to a year older than the copyright date indicates because of the review process.
- Articles in periodicals will be more current than books.

Timeliness on the Web

- It’s often difficult to determine the age of information on a web page.
  - Although sometimes the page will include a date of last revision, this may reflect a redesign of the web page and not a change in its content.
- Just because information is on the Web doesn’t mean that it’s up to date.
Bias

• When you using information that you find on the web, you need to discern if there is a bias on the part of the site owners.
  – Domain names ending in .com indicate corporate sites are trying to encourage to buy their products.
  – Non-profit organizations whose domain names end in may be trying to solicit a contribution.

Do They Have An “Axe to Grind”

• Business seeking customers and charities seeking donations are not the only sites trying to present a point of view.
• There are many web sites that are political and are trying to advance a political point of view.
• There are facts and there are opinions based on these facts. Certain key words may indicate that this is an opinion.
How To Spot Bias

• Spotting this bias may not always be easy – it helps to start with a current issues reference site, such as CQ Press Researcher. (http://www.cqpress.com/researcher)

Accuracy

• Accuracy can be determined based on the sources used and cited by the author.
• Look through an author’s bibliography: are these published in reputable journals?
• If there are links to other web sites, look at these other web sites. Are they credible?
• Google’s advanced search has page-specific tools that can show if there are similar pages that are credible.
CRAAP Test

- The CRAAP provides an easy-to-remember mnemonic and a set of easy tests when evaluating materials.

Source – Gettysburg College Library Web Site
http://www.gettysburg.edu/library/research/tips/webeval/index.dot

CRAAP Test

- **Currency** - The timeliness of the information.
- **Relevance/Coverage** - The depth and importance of the information.
- **Authority** - The source of the information.
- **Accuracy** - The reliability of the information.
- **Purpose/Objectivity** - The possible bias present in the information.
Currency

• When was the information posted or updated?
• Does the page have links that are no longer functional?
• Outdated: http://www.vegsource.com
• Current: http://nytimes.com

Relevance

• What is the depth of the information?
• Who is the intended audience?
• Is better information available in another source?
• Questionable depth:
  – http://timetforkids.com/TFK/specials/whm/0.08805.10104500.html
Authority

• Can you tell who wrote it?
• Whose website is it? Is the owner reputable?
• Does the author have credentials?
• Less reputable
  – http://www.whitehouse.org
  – http://python.org/~guido
• More reputable
  – http://heinzhome.heinzctrinfo.net/index.shtml

Accuracy

• Are there citations to the sources of the information? Are these sources reputable?
• Are there spelling, grammar, or typographical errors?
• Inaccurate sites:
Purpose

• Why was this page put on the web?
• Can you determine possible bias?
• Can you find possible conflict of interest?
• Possible bias:
  – http://zip4tweens.com
  – http://www.beefnutrition.org
  – http://www.chevron.com