

CSC 170 - Introduction to Computers and Their Applications

Information Lecture 2 – Evaluating Information Sources

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=VvVhN3_ex_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 know 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, reference 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 indicates 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://seawifs.gsfc.nasa.gov/OCEAN_PLANET/HTML/popsci.html
 - <http://timeforkids.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:
- <http://www.improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/feline-nov2001.html>

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>