

Guidelines for Evaluating Information on the Internet

Why Evaluate a Website?

Since anyone—an individual, organization, business, group, the government—can post a website on the Internet, it's important to test whether the information is accurate or inaccurate, balanced or biased.

You can skim through a website to get a feel for the information it contains. In addition, use the five guidelines that follow to evaluate the quality of that information.

- 1. Check the source.** You'll find the source or sponsor of the website at the top or bottom of the home page. Is this a reputable source? Do its contributors know the topic?
- 2. Check credentials.** Educational degrees, job titles, and other training and experience are the credentials that can make a person an expert or authority on a topic. You need to know that those who created the website are knowledgeable on your topic.
- 3. Identify the website's purpose.** Figure out whether the site's purpose is to provide information, to sell products, to raise money, or to promote a cause. Knowing the purposes will enable you evaluate the reliability of the data.
- 4. Check the last-updated date.** Continual updates of the information on a site are a sign that those creating the site are serious about supplying new and accurate information.
- 5. Question a website's accuracy.** Here are red flags that will warn you that the website's data may not be accurate:
 - * The source is missing.
 - * The source is not well known.
 - * The purpose of the site is to sell a product or promote a political party or cause.
 - * The text contains spelling and grammatical errors.