

Evaluating Web Resources

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Thomas Jefferson Library Reference Department

<http://www.umsl.edu/library>

The Internet

The Internet (Net) is the vast collection of interconnected networks that evolved from the *ARPANET* of the late 60's and early 70's. Today the Internet connects independent networks into a vast global internet, and it facilitates data communication services such as email, file transfer, the World Wide Web (Web), and newsgroups.¹

There is a tremendous amount of information available on the Internet and more information becomes available every day. When conducting Web searches via a search engine (e. g., Google), it is often not possible to tell if these documents are accurate or authoritative. The Internet is a constantly changing, international environment that is ungoverned, generally uncensored, and uncontrolled.

Databases

By comparison, the journal articles and other online resources available through the UM-St. Louis Libraries have been evaluated and determined to be authoritative sources by editors, scholars, and librarians. These databases (or, electronic resources) allow you to simultaneously search through hundreds of magazines, journals, and newspapers from credible publishing companies. Your results show you who wrote the article, who published it, and when it was published. The information is updated regularly and provides you with current and back issues.

Most of the Libraries' databases are provided to current UMSL students, faculty, and staff through the Internet. To be certain that you are accessing authoritative pages from the Internet, begin your search via the Libraries home page at <http://www.umsl.edu/library>. Choose, **Sorted Alphabetically** or **Sorted By Subject**. Or, consult with a reference librarian for the best sources of online and print information on your topic.

1. Pfaffenberger, Bryan. "The Internet." *Webster's New World Computer Dictionary*, 10th edition, Indianapolis: Wiley, 2003

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Evaluation of Web documents	How to interpret the basics
<p>1. Accuracy of Web Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who wrote the page and can you contact him or her? • What is the purpose of the document and why was it produced? • Is this person qualified to write this document? 	<p>Accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure author provides e-mail or a contact address/phone number. • Know the distinction between author and Webmaster.
<p>2. Authority of Web Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who published the document and is it separate from the "Webmaster?" • Check the domain of the document; what institution publishes this document? • Does the publisher list his or her qualifications? 	<p>Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What credentials are listed for the author(s)? • Where is the document published? Check URL domain.
<p>3. Objectivity of Web Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What goals/objectives does this page meet? • How detailed is the information? • What opinions (if any) are expressed by the author? 	<p>Objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if page is a mask for advertising; if so information might be biased. • View any Web page as you would an infomercial on television. Ask yourself why was this written and for whom?
<p>4. Currency of Web Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was it produced? • When was it updated? • How up-to-date are the links (if any)? 	<p>Currency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many dead links are on the page? • Are the links current or updated regularly? • Is the information on the page outdated?
<p>5. Coverage of the Web Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the links (if any) evaluated and do they complement the document's theme? • Is it all images or a balance of text and images? • Is the information presented cited correctly? 	<p>Coverage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If page requires special software to view the information, how much are you missing if you don't have the software? • Is it free, or is there a fee, to obtain the information? • Is there an option for text only, or frames, or a suggested browser for better viewing?