



Evaluating web pages

The Internet has revolutionised research. Instead of looking only at print resources, it is now possible to have fast and easy access to the best and the worst on the web. This may make you think that the Internet is a better source of information than books and journals. In fact you need to be more careful with information found on the web because anyone can set up a web page. In contrast, the publishers of print material control and check what goes out under their name and the online databases available through the Library, like print resources, are evaluated and selected by university librarians.

Evaluation of web pages
<p>Accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who wrote the page and can you contact the person or organisation?• Is the author qualified to write this page? If they are, the information is more likely to be reliable.• Can the accuracy of the factual information presented be verified from other sources?
<p>Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check the domain of the site. What institution publishes this page?• Is there a way of verifying the publisher's legitimacy – a postal address or phone number?• What credentials are listed for the author(s)? Are they known experts in the field, or do they work for a recognized institution?
<p>Objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why was the site created? To provide information as a public service? To promote the ideas of a particular political, cultural or religious group? To advertise a product?• Is the information free of advertising? If there is advertising on the page, is it clearly differentiated from the information content?
<p>Currency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When was the page produced? Check for a date on the home page.• When was it last updated?• How up-to-date are the links (if any)?
<p>Coverage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there an indication that the page has been completed, and is not still under construction?• If there is a print equivalent to the web page, is there a clear indication of whether the entire work is available on the web or only parts of it?• Is the information that is freely available complete, or is it a sample of something you have to pay for?

Adapted from Jim Kapoun 1998, *Teaching undergrads web evaluation - a guide for library instruction*.

Try the **Evaluation worksheet** on the **SOFWeb** site for a useful checklist for evaluating sites <<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/internet/workshet.htm>>.

Analysing a web address or URL

Think critically about the sources of the information you find on the Internet. You can tell a lot about whether an internet site is reliable or appropriate for your needs by analysing the URL (universal resource locator). Compare the university's Australian web address with the address for the university's London centre or the address for the City of Monash.

Monash University	Monash University London Centre	City of Monash
www.monash.edu.au	www.monash.ac.uk	www.monash.vic.gov.au
www = World Wide Web	www = World Wide Web	www = World Wide Web
monash = name of the organisation	monash = name of the organisation	monash = name of the organisation
.edu = education	.ac = education	.gov = government
.au = Australia	.uk = Britain	.au = Australia

The domain tells you the nature of the organisation:

- **.ac** = academic (in Britain and New Zealand)
- **.com** = commercial (**.co** in Britain)
- **.org** = non-profit organisation
- **.mil** = military.

Information on research into smoking and lung cancer might be more reliable if it comes from an **.edu** site than if it is on a **.com** site related to the tobacco industry.

If there is no country code, the organisation is registered in the USA. This can mean that it is an international organisation eg <<http://www.monash.edu>>.

Check the **Virtual Librarian** tutorial <<http://www.lib.monash.edu/vl/www/wwwcon.htm>> on the Library website for more on URLs, including a list of organisation types and countries.

For further information

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Grassian, Esther 1997 (updated 13 June 2006), 'Thinking critically about discipline-based world wide web resources', UCLA College Library, viewed 2 December 2006, <<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/discipline.htm>>.

Henninger, Maureen 1999, *Don't just surf: effective research strategies for the net* (2nd edition), University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.

Kapoun, Jim 1998, 'Teaching undergrads web evaluation - a guide for library instruction', in *College and Research Libraries News*, July/August 1998, volume 59, no. 7, viewed 2 December 2006, <<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/backissues/1998/julyaugust6/teachingundergrads.htm>>.

Monash University Library, 'How to evaluate what you find', *Library online tutorials*, Monash University 1994-2005 (last updated 26 September 2003), viewed 2 December 2006, <<http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/vl/eval/evalcon.htm>>.

State of Victoria Department of Education, Employment and Training, 'Evaluating the internet', SOFWeb site (last updated 19 January 2006) viewed 2 December 2006, <<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/internet/research.htm>>.