

Evaluating Web Site Details

Teacher Resource Page

The units listed below will let the teacher guide their students through a overview of the criteria for evaluating web resources. Each unit can comprise one lesson of approximately 15-minutes. For a one-hour class period, this would allow all of the areas to be covered in about two or three days of instruction.

For each unit, URL links are provided that will allow the teacher to access a web site that more fully explains, generally with visual elements, or demonstrates the concept being covered. Note that it is advised that each site to be used be previewed prior to the presentation of the lesson, so that any issues with navigation of the site and use of the information in understood.

Each lesson is worth 3 points. One point for each question answered under each lesson. Total points possible is 24 pts. Points for the optional lesson is not included.

Teachers will need to print out the student guide before the lessons.

Criteria for Evaluating Web Resources

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| * Purpose | * Authority | * Objectivity |
| * Appropriateness | * Currency | * Responsibility |
| * Clarity | * Accessibility | * Hoaxes |

Purpose (Module 3 Lesson 1)

What is the purpose of a Web site? Web pages may be –

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| > commercial | > persuasive | > informative |
| > personal | > educational | > institutional |
| > entertaining | > a hoax | |

What does the URL (web address) say about the creator of the website and its purpose? By looking at the final syllable in the domain name, one can determine something about the type of site, and the information on that site. Some examples include:

- | | |
|------|---|
| .gov | Government agency: www.whitehouse.gov |
| .net | Internet service provider: www.comcast.net |

.com	Commercial site: www.target.com
.edu	Higher education: www.csus.edu
.mil	Military site: www.navy.mil
.org	Organization / may be charitable, religious, or a lobbying group, among others: http://en.wikipedia.org

There are numerous top-level domain names, in addition to country names that appear as two-letter abbreviations in the domain name. More details on this can be found at this link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains

Note that when conducting general searches with search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing, and similar providers, the type of web site listed and the order of the list generated will greatly depend on the keywords used for the search. By having students try different keywords for the subject being researched, and noting the domain names in the generated list, students can determine whether to include or exclude certain keywords being used.

Authority (Module 3 Lesson 2)

Authority defines the level of expertise of person, group, or organization that developed the web site. Some common questions to ask when looking at the web site include:

- * Who is the author of the site?
- * What are the credentials (professional background, education, or experience) of the person or group?
- * Does this person or group have sufficient authority to speak on the subject and information on the web site?
- * Is there contact information, preferably multiple options, such as name, address phone number, eMail address, FaceBook, or other options?
- * Is there an organization or corporate sponsor, and what is their role?
- * Is there a list of references?
- * Is the page authentic, or is it a hoax page?

<http://askville.amazon.com/source-information-encyclopedia-Britannica-Wikipedia/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=2653843>

<http://pyropus.ca/personal/writings/wikipedia.html>

One of the most discussed topics in relation to the question of authority concerns the use of the Wikipedia web site for research information. Many research experts feel that the open forum for the generation and posting of information on Wikipedia depends too much on the monitoring and checking of information by potentially unqualified individuals. Others feel that, especially for current and fast-changing information, Wikipedia offers updates that cannot be accessed through more traditional sources such as Encyclopedia Britannica. The question of whether to use something like Wikipedia as a starting point, and using the references included at the end of posted articles, and then moving to sources with better authority, is a good topic for general discussion in this area.

Objectivity (Module 3 Lesson 3)

Objectivity looks at whether there is bias to the informational content. Check if advertising and the information content are being supplied by the same person or organization. Keep in mind that many websites with excellent information are sponsored by commercial entities or take advertisements to finance the website.

- * Does the content reflect a bias?
- * Is the bias explicit or hidden?
- * Does the identity of the author or sponsor suggest a bias?
- * How does the bias impact the usefulness of the information?

<http://libguides.uta.edu/content.php?pid=134106&sid=1150399>

<http://www.publicagenda.org/>

In some cases, accessing a site with obvious bias may be desired. For example, a student doing a report on the right to bear arms under the US Constitution will find a great deal of information supporting this position at the National Rifle Association (NRA) web site. A student looking for a pro-environmental viewpoint for a debate would use find the Sierra Club web site useful. The students should understand the viewpoint that they need to defend or research, and to search on the web site selected whether the information presented can give them the information perspective that they seek. Of course, if the issues at hand for the assignment requires a balanced analysis, student will need understand the importance of selecting enough web sites so as to allow for a complete analysis and comparison of the information.

Appropriateness & Relevance (Module 3 Lesson 4)

Each web site is constructed to address and appeal to a particular age group, a range of age groups, and to provide information at a particular level of cognitive development. The ability of a user to understand the information presented, and to navigate the information on the web site generally depends on a combination of reading skills, familiarity with the types of page layouts commonly used, and a general level of knowledge about the subject(s) presented.

- * Is the content appropriate for the assignment?
- * Is the reading level appropriate for the project?
- * Is the content appropriate for the age or developmental level of the audience?
- * Is the content accurate, complete, and well-written?
- * Is the content relevant to your topic or question?

<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/research/AIDSFacts.htm>

For K-12 level projects, it is good practice for the teachers to offer selected web sites from which to begin the search for information on a particular topic, and to overview with the students the self-responsibility to access appropriate sites. All school district provide some level of screening when school computers are used, but the open access many students have with personal home computers may necessitate an advisory or warning letter to be set home to parents, especially if the subjects being researched are know to be controversial in nature.

Currency (Module 4 Lesson 1)

Currency relates to how up-to-date the web site is. Many web sites need to regularly add new or updated information, while others may contain facts that will be unchanging. If the web site connects to other web sites, it is important that the links on the site are regularly checked.

- * Is the information on the pages up-to-date?
- * Can you find information about when the page was last updated?
- * Do all of the links on the pages work?
- * Is there a difference between the date the information was created and when the page was last updated?

Look at these two sites and compare them using the questions listed.

<http://www.webdesignfromscratch.com/web-design/best-designed-websites-2012/>

<http://www.angelfire.com/super/badwebs/>

If a site is poorly constructed, students may or may not be able to even download portions of the site, due to compatibility problems with the browser that they prefer to use. It is not uncommon for a web site to not properly download with one browser, such as Internet Explorer (especially older versions of the browser) while the web site will have no problem downloading with the Firefox browser. It is important the student, when using their own computers, to regularly check for updates for both the browser that they prefer to use and the plug-in modules used by many browsers to improve internet access.

Responsibility (Module 4 Lesson 2)

Responsibility shows what person or organization is directly tasked with ensuring that web site follows standards of professionalism with the web community, and the larger user community. It includes looking at such questions as:

- * Are the authors of the web site up-front about their purpose and content?
- * Is there a way to contact the authors who created and maintain the web site?
- * Do the authors give credit for information used on the web site?
- * Is there a list of references?

<http://www.out-law.com/page-4540>

<http://www2.cit.cornell.edu/computer/www/guidelines/content.html>

It is generally poorly understood by students that for most web sites, the written information and pictures on the site, especially for commercial site, is owned by the creators and/or commercial corporation responsible for the site. While limited usage of most materials is allowed under copyright code, the amount of materials used (usually through a copy-and-paste method) is not unlimited. Discussions of fair usage should be discussed and examples noted in this area.

Clarity (Module 4 Lesson 3)

Clarity looks at how the information is presented on the web site. A clean, well thought out web site makes it easy for a new visitor to navigate and find the information they seek.

- * Is the information on the web site presented clearly?
- * Is the text neat, legible, and formatted for easy reading?
- * If there are graphics, do they add to the content or distract from it?
- * If there are advertisements, do they interfere with the ability to use the page?
- * Are the pages well organized?
- * Are there mistakes in spelling or word usage?

<http://www.webdesignfromscratch.com/web-design/clarity/>

<http://www.webdesignfromscratch.com/web-design/top-10-best-designed-web-sites-in-the-world-2010/>

Accessibility (Module 4 Lesson 4)

A number of Internet users are visually-impaired or blind. In order to navigate a web site, these users need to have special instructions built into the web page so that they can access the information with screen readers and related devices. Built in components like screen magnification, and the ability to adjust the contrast, are also useful in many situations.

- * Can you get to the site?
- * Does the site load quickly?
- * Can you move around the site easily?
- * Is the site or page there after long lengths of time between visits?
- * Is there a text-only alternative for the visually-impaired?

<http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-accessibility/basics.shtml>

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php>

As with the issue of clarity, the manner in which a web site is constructed directly impacts how the web site will be accessed. The issue of the browser being used and the updates and plug-ins for the browser will again determine whether the questions outlined above play a significant factor in the access to information on the web site.

Hoaxes (Optional Lesson)

Hoaxes present a significant challenge to determine whether the information presented gives misinformation that the unaware reader may take to be real. To verify the authenticity of a site, the reader may need to compare the information with other sites of a similar topic. Look at the examples below that contain lists of hoax web sites to gain some experience in evaluating the information presented.

http://www.shsu.edu/~lis_mah/documents/TCEA/hoaxtable.html

<http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/hoaxsites.html>

<http://www.philb.com/fakesites.htm>

References

Beck, Susan E. (1997, July 7). *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, or Why It's a Good Idea to Evaluate Web Sources*. Institute for Technology-Assisted Learning, New Mexico State University. Retrieved December 01, 2012, from the World Wide Web: <http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/eval.html>.

Piper, Paul S. (2000, September). Better read that again: Web hoaxes and misinformation. *Searcher*, 8 (8). Retrieved December 01, 2012 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.infoday.com/searcher/sep00/piper.htm>.

Tilman, Hope N. (2000, May 30). *Evaluating Quality on the Net*. Retrieved November 30, 2012, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.hopetillman.com/findqual.html>.

Humphries, LaJean (2002 November). *Features - How to Evaluate a Web Site*. Retrieved December 04, 2012, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.llrx.com/features/webeval.htm>

Student Guide

This guide will be used to organize information presented in the lessons and discussions presented by the teacher in the Evaluating A Web Site presentations.

Purpose

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?
2. In looking at one of the examples from the web link used, what did you feel was the most useful piece of information or detail about the web site, in regard to the theme of the lesson?
3. How would using the information presented be useful to you when searching for information on a web site?

Authority

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?
2. In looking at one of the examples from the web link used, what did you feel was the most useful piece of information or detail about the web site, in regard to the theme of the lesson?
3. How would using the information presented be useful to you when searching for information on a web site?

Objectivity

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?
2. In looking at one of the examples from the web link used, what did you feel was the most useful piece of information or detail about the web site, in regard to the theme of the lesson?
3. How would using the information presented be useful to you when searching for information on a web site?

Appropriateness

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?
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3. How would using the information presented be useful to you when searching for information on a web site?

Currency

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?

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3. How would using the information presented be useful to you when searching for information on a web site?

Responsibility

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?

2. In looking at one of the examples from the web link used, what did you feel was the most useful piece of information or detail about the web site, in regard to the theme of the lesson?

3. How would using the information presented be useful to you when searching for information on a web site?

Clarity

1. In your own words, what was the main idea presented?

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Accessibility

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Hoaxes

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