WEBSITE ANALYSIS - INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The capacity to critically evaluate information is central within the research process of locating resources for academic purposes. Apart from being able to differentiate between fact and fiction, it's important for us to be able to assess the relevance, accuracy and suitability of information to your particular purpose. Using poor quality information sources or worse still - citing misinformation - will degrade the quality of our work. While evaluation of information sources has always been important, this step is particularly important when using information found on the Internet.

Need to Evaluate

There is no central governing body for Internet publishing. It's extremely easy, cheap and fast to publish on the Internet. There is no system of quality control; there are no editors; and documents can be easily falsified and/or copied. This is the fundamental nature of the World Wide Web! One of the most positive aspects of the Web is that it provides a means for people to express themselves; it allows for freedom of speech and ideas; and allows people to meet and communicate who would not ordinarily ever have met. As long as the Web retains these qualities of freedom, it will also remain unmonitored and unregulated. This, therefore, leaves a large responsibility on us, the user, to carefully and critically evaluate the Web sites we use as information sources.

Internet

The Internet is an international network of computers linked to exchange information. The word is a contraction of "**inter**national" and "**net**work." Every computer that people use, gets registered and people have to pay to get an address for that computer; called a **U**niform **R**esource **L**ocator = URL.

Search Engines

Search Engines are **W**orld **W**ide **W**eb sites that use computers to catalog millions of web pages, which one can use to search for specific text. Most people tend to use their favorite "engine". Some of the most popular are: Google, Ask, Alta Vista, Excite, Yahoo, Hot Bot and Cuil.

Google

Google is the "Big Daddy" of all search engines. It is a metasearch engine that conducts the search across many different search engines at once. It delivers results that pay attention to the proximity of the search terms you enter. Google also ranks its results based on the amount of "hits" (and links from other sites) per URL. You can also go to Google and type in New Search Engines and get a list of what's new out there in "air" land!

Search Tips

If we are using a search engine and are either getting too much or too little, here are some search tips. Be as specific as possible; check our spelling, change pluralization or "put a phrase" in "quotes". Searching with a broad keyword like "Algebra" will return a number of irrelevant results. Narrow the keyword, such as, "Algebraic identity" or "Quadratic Equations". This will result in more specific information.

How to Evaluate a Website

Although many people evaluate Web sites (particularly commercial sites) based purely on their look and feel, for academic purposes it is far more important to evaluate the content of a site. Don't be put off a site because it is unattractive - much of the quality information resides on sites that are unadorned by flashy graphics and images. On the flip side of the coin, many sites that look great have little real substance. If you are citing information for assessment purposes, the reader (or the marker) will be unimpressed by the attractiveness of your source, more that you have been able to verify the accuracy and objectivity of the content it contains. When using a Web site for research purposes, in the first instance look for sites that contain at least the author's name, title or position, organisational affiliation, contact details and the date of creation. Sometimes you'll be tipped off by the general tone or style of a site, or the apparent competence of the writer. However, some authors go to great lengths to disguise the main objective of a site and you will need to look much harder and further for clues about the overall integrity and accuracy of the information provided. You should then go on to test for some further indicators of quality in the areas of credibility, accuracy, objectivity and support as outlined below:

Credibility

Before acting on or making any decision based on information most people take into account the credibility of the source. Assessing the credibility of a page involves working out who is responsible for the information, if they are who they say they are and whether or not they are a qualified authority. Regardless of how professional a site looks, we must investigate it's credibility if we want to use information contained on the site.

Author Details

If we find information on a Web site we wish to use or quote we must first attempt to find the author's or authoring institution's details.

- Look for the author's name and/or email address on the Web page (try the top and bottom of the page, side bars, menu bars or About Us sections)
- Is the author qualified in the field? Are they a reliable authority on the subject?
- Does the authoring organisation or person match the URL?

Uniqueness

Uniqueness refers to the amount of original material on a site that cannot be obtained elsewhere. If we have spent any time searching the Web, we will know that we often end up at the same site, or else different sites containing the same or very similar information and links. When evaluating a site, be clear about whether the information contained is primary or secondary information. Primary information is original material produced by the owners of the site with mainly internal links i.e. links to other parts of the site on the same server. Secondary information is very common on the Web and is typified by lists of links to other sites.

Completeness

A clue in the credibility of a site is its completeness. This can be due to the site being unfinished and still a work in progress or because it is only meant to serve as a taster to material that can be accessed or purchased elsewhere.

- Check that there are no dead links
- Are all links live (not greyed out)
- There should be no 'under construction signs'
- Does the site include all the necessary information or just an abstract, table of contents or review?

Audience

This area will be touched on again under objectivity, but it also applies in this, the area of Web site credibility. Before using information from a Web site, do take into account the intended audience. For example, a site about volcanoes for primary school children will probably not provide the depth or complexity of information necessary for a university geology paper.

Accuracy

Once you have checked the overall credibility of a Web site, you should move on to evaluate the accuracy of the information presented. Information from even the most respected source is useless if it's wrong or outdated!

Currency of information

Some information is timeless- it remains static regardless of how long ago it was published. This applies to works such as novels. However, much information today has a very limited shelf life - technology news dates extremely quickly. Advances in medical research makes things of fantasy ten years ago a reality today. Web sites that contain information such as news, weather, timetables, prices, statistics or latest research obviously need to be updated on a regular basis or they may provide misinformation. This is not to say that all older information is useless - information written some time ago can be useful for comparing current information with (e.g. the growth in a

population or comparisons between treatment of disease) but it must always be obvious how old information is.

- Look for the date of creation on any information you wish to use
- Check for the date of last update
- Check for statements regarding the frequency of updates
- Be sure as to whether you are viewing current or archived information.

Typographical errors/spelling mistakes

In addition to lowering the tone and taking away from the overall integrity of a site, typographical, spelling and grammatical errors can affect the accuracy of the information provided. Be wary of a site that includes many of these errors as it is difficult to tell whether the errors are due to carelessness or an intent to mislead.

Factual

Look for supporting evidence of information supplied in the way of references or bibliographies. While some sites claim to be presenting 'the facts' further investigation may reveal they are presenting either a biased view or completely inaccurate information. This point will be elaborated on in the Objectivity section.

Objectivity

Objectivity refers to how balanced and fair the information is. While it should obviously be truthful, the information presented should be balanced, cover all sides of the story and should be presented without bias. To help gauge the objectivity of a site, you should first ascertain the original goal of the site and whether here has been any sponsorship associated with the information. The greatest danger to the objectivity of a site is a conflict of interest. For example an article on the dangers of babies drinking soy milk that is sponsored by the dairy association may ring alarm bells. The information and activity earlier in this topic about different types of Web sites should help you to recognise any conflict of interests on a Web site.

Support

Support refers to how well the information presented can be verified and corroborated if necessary. If we have any questions or reservations about a site or the information presented, the support offered should assist us in clarifying any grey areas. Information should be supported by references and/or bibliographies. This is especially important when presenting statistics. If we are unable to find any other source that corroborates the information presented be wary. We should be able to triangulate the information (find two other sources that support the information).

Look for:

- References and bibliographies
- Supporting documents and/or links
- Contact follow up details supplied

IDENTIFICATION AND CATALOGUING WEBSITE - 1

URL of Website :

Title of article or work :

Author (Last name) :

Author (First name) :

Author Address :

Editor :

Publication Information :

Date of Publication :

Date of Access :

Font size of the Website :

Pictures :

Videos / Animations :

Background Colour :

Font Colour :

External Links (any) :

References (if any) :

Language and Vocabulary :

Exercise Details :

Level of Subject Matter :

Subject Matter of the Site :

Overall Vision :

IDENTIFICATION AND CATALOGUING WEBSITE - 2

URL of Website :

Title of article or work :

Author (Last name) :

Author (First name) :

Author Address :

Editor :

Publication Information :

Date of Publication :

Date of Access :

Font size of the Website :

Pictures :

Videos / Animations :

Background Colour :

Font Colour :

External Links (any) :

References (if any) :

Language and Vocabulary :

Exercise Details :

Level of Subject Matter :

Subject Matter of the Site :

Overall Vision :

Comparative analysis OF TWO Websites

TITLE OF WEBSITE			
ADDRESS OR URL			
DATE VISITED			
1	**DESIGN**		

TITLE OF WEBSITE			
ADDRESS OR URL			
DATE VISITED			
2	**CONTENT**		
3	**TECHNOLOGY**		

TITLE OF WEBSITE			
ADDRESS OR URL			
DATE VISITED			
4	**CREDIBLE**		
5	**PEDAGOGY**		
END OF COMPARISON OF TWO WEBPAGES			

RUBRICS FOR EVALUATING WEBSITES

		WEBSITE (A)			WEBSITE (B)		
Title of Website							
Address or URL							
S.No.	**CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION**	**Rating**			**Rating**		
		Not So Good	**Okay**	**Good**	**Not So Good**	**Okay**	**Good**
		1	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**
	AUTHORITY / CREDIBILITY						
1	The author's name is given						
2	The author's organisation or institution is given						
3	The author's qualification and experiences are given						
4	The author's contact information is given						
	ACCURACY / CURRENCY						
5	The date that the webpage was last updated is given						
6	The information is up-to-date						
7	The information is complete						
8	There are no spelling mistakes or grammatical errors						
9	Bibliographies or References are given						
	BIAS / OBJECTIVITY						
10	Statement of purpose / scope						
11	Site avoids social bias (gender, racial, religious etc.)						
12	Information presented as factual and primary in origin						
13	Site enrich and expand users imagination						
14	The information presented free of advertising						

		WEBSITE (A)			WEBSITE (B)		
Title of Website							
Address or URL							
S.No.	**CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION**	**Rating**			**Rating**		
		Not So Good	**Okay**	**Good**	**Not So Good**	**Okay**	**Good**
		1	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**
	CONTENT / RELEVANCY						
15	Site has a meaningful title						
16	Site offers new material on subject area						
17	All information are very useful						
18	Additional resources links are included.						
19	Site integrates several content areas or disciplines.						
	DESIGN / TECHNOLOGY						
20	The pictures are relevant and clear						
21	The pages are easy to move around						
22	All of the links are work						
23	The pages load relatively quickly (About 30 Seconds)						
24	Text easy to read and not cluttered						
25	Design appropriate for intended audience						
	Overall – how does the website rate?						
	Total Score						
	Rating based on the total number of Scores						
&&&&&&& END &&&&&&&							

CONCLUSION

REFERENCES / WEB RESOURCES

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2.

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