

Info skills

Evaluating websites



Introduction

The Internet can be an excellent source of high quality, reliable information. It can also be a source of a huge amount of incorrect and potentially malicious information. This is because anybody can publish anything on the Internet. Sometimes it is hard to tell the 'good' from the 'bad' on the Internet.

Criteria for evaluating websites

Being able to evaluate the quality of websites is a very important skill. However, that does not mean that it needs to be a difficult skill to learn. In fact, all you need to remember is to always ask yourself the following questions about the website you are on:

Authorship

Who?

- Who has published this information?
- Are they likely to be biased (e.g. for business or political reasons or due to sponsorship)? What authority do they have e.g. are they an expert?
- Are there contact details so you can follow up on any queries?
- TIP: You should be able to find who wrote the page from the 'about us' or 'contact us' link.

Where?

- Where is the information coming from?
- Which country?
- Which web domain? E.g. educational = ac.uk or edu, government = gov, commercial = com or co.uk.

Relevance

What?

- What is the website actually about?
- In what context is the information being provided e.g. are they stating 'scientific facts' in the context of an advertisement?
- What is its target audience e.g. education, general public, business, political activists? What do other people say about the site – are there reviews or comments?

Why?

- Why does the website / webpage exist?
- What is its purpose? E.g. selling a product or an idea, explaining concepts and theories, opposing an idea or action (is it overly critical?), educating, entertaining.

How?

- How accurate is the web page?
- Does it state its sources?
- Are there grammatical, spelling or typing mistakes? How easy to use is it?
- How does it compare with similar sites in terms of content, layout and quality – what are its advantages?

Currency

When?

- When was the information written / published?
- Is it up-to-date?
- Does the age of the information affect its relevance to you?
- TIP: You can normally find the date of publication from the copyright notice at the foot of the webpage.