



Evaluating Websites – English Transcript

If a stranger came up to you and started talking about a topic, you'd probably want to know more about him and what he was saying before you took him seriously. The same goes for websites. There is a lot of useful information on the Internet. However, since anyone can publish to the Internet, it is crucial to evaluate websites before relying on the information.

In this tutorial, you'll learn about the importance of evaluating information on the Internet, learn some questions to consider when you're looking at websites, and get some practical tips about how to evaluate Internet sites.

Many of us use the Internet to gather information for all sorts of things. We might use that information to make decisions about health, politics, finances, or social issues. Our whole way of viewing the world is based on the information that we encounter, and these days, a lot of that information comes from the Internet. That's why it's so important to think about and evaluate the information that you find on the Internet. Of course, evaluating Internet information is also good for your assignments. It will make your research better and strengthen your arguments.

Keep in mind that while Google is a great search engine, there are others out there to try, too. Different search engines work in different ways and will return different results. Many factors affect the order in which search results are displayed. For example, companies can pay to have their websites listed first. Therefore, the first several hits may not be the best ones to answer your questions. It is good to review as many results as you can manage, not just the first three or four.

There are several methods for evaluating websites. Here's a simple one with only four steps -- author, motivation and bias, evidence, timeliness. When you're looking at a website, first consider the author. Ask yourself, who wrote this information? What can you gather about the author's background? Is the author an individual or a group? Is the author an expert on this topic? Are they sharing opinions or facts? How does all of this shape what the author has written?

You might have to dig to find out about the author of your webpage. If you don't see the author's name, click on links such as Info or About. These links are usually found on the perimeter or edges of the website, and they may lead to information about the author.

Even if you find out about the author, you may still have questions. If so, try Googling the author's name to learn about their background, expertise, point of view, or others' opinions of them. If you decide to use the site, knowing about the author will help you analyze the information that you have found and use it more effectively.

Next, consider motivation or bias. Is the webpage supported by a group, organization, or company? What, if anything, does the group stand to gain by convincing others of its points?



This could be monetary, political, or something else.

Is the information likely to have been reviewed by other people before it was published, or is this information from a personal site where someone is expressing his or her own opinions? Again, you might have to dig to figure out who supports the points that are being expressed.

Analyzing the URL can also be helpful. Education or government sites are more likely to provide objective information. Commercial sites are usually motivated to make money in some way. Tildes followed by a personal name usually indicate personal sites. Also, blogs often reflect personal opinions. Shortening the URL to find the homepage of the site you are viewing might give you some details about any groups or organizations that the website is aligned with.

When you know more about potential motivations or biases associated with the site, think about how these might affect the information that you're viewing. Also, consider your own emotional attachment to the content of the site. Are you able to objectively evaluate it?

Next, ask yourself, what evidence does the author provide to support the points he or she is trying to make? Does the site list citations or links to other websites, data, or print resources? Do links actually work? Can you verify evidence used in the site? Does the site rely on evidence from many different sources, or just a couple? The more verifiable evidence that a website uses, the more likely it is that the information is trustworthy.

Finally, consider timeliness. When was the information published or last updated? The way people think and talk about topics changes at different points in time. For example, it was not that long ago in history that women did not have the right to vote. Therefore, make sure that the site you're viewing is either up to date or was published at a time that is relevant to the topic you're studying.

When you're researching on the web, be a skeptic. When you're taking in any information, it's good to think about factors that might impact it. This will help you to make stronger arguments and better decisions. You'd be skeptical about a stranger's word on the street. It's good to think about Internet sources the same way.

Consider the four evaluation criteria -- author, motivation and bias, evidence, and timeliness. What you discovered will influence whether or not to use the website as a source for your paper or for life decisions.

For specific examples, and for more information about this topic and the entire research process, explore OSLIS. Thank you to the Oregon CLIP project for allowing the OSLIS Committee to adapt their tutorials. OSLIS -- Learn to Research. Research to Learn.