Information Literacy 10
Evaluate Information and Its Sources Critically

Evaluation Process for All Sources of Information
It is essential to evaluate information and its source. The following criteria overlap and intersect with each other and are useful in examining information on the Web, from a book, a magazine, or a television program. There is no organization or editorial process that oversees the Internet to ensure accuracy, objectivity, or currency. For that reason, it is especially important to evaluate information on the Web because anyone can create an Internet web page.

Information on the World Wide Web (WWW)

1. Accuracy
   - Are there other sources that verify the information?
   - Look at who is providing the information. Is there a way to contact the author? If the site doesn’t identify who is providing the information, be cautious. What is the site domain?
   - Some Web site domains and organizations to look for in the URL:
     .com = commercial          .mil = military          .us = United States
     .edu = education institutions .net = networks        .uk = United Kingdom
     .gov = government (US)       .org = nonprofit organizations

2. Authority
   - The background and credentials of the author should be available. Are they experts in the field of information you are examining?
   - Is the information part of the main web page or is it a separate document?
   - Remember to look at the domain for a clue to their authority.

3. Completeness/Objectivity
   - Are all sides of a question presented? Are there limitations?
   - What is the purpose of the site? Is it to sell, persuade, or inform?
   - Is the page or information designed for a specific audience?
   - What are the opinions of the author? Can you find them?
   - Is this page relevant to your information need? Can you use it?

4. Timeliness/Currency
   - What is the date of information? Has it been updated?
   - Is currency important for your subject? Are the links current and updated?
   - Is the information outdated?

5. Coverage/Arrangement
   - Are the links evaluated and relevant? Are there fees to obtain in-depth information?
   - Is it well organized and easy to use?
   - Is credit given to other authors and institutions? Are the citations correct?
   - Is the page a balance of information and graphics? Is special software needed?
Evaluating Print Sources of Information (Books, periodicals, pamphlets, etc.)

Evaluating print sources is also important. Print sources can have misinformation or biased information. Use the following criteria to help determine the value of information in print.

1. Accuracy
   • Are there other sources that verify the information?
   • Are other sources cited in the work you are using?

2. Arrangement/Relevance
   • Is it easy to use? Does it have a table of contents, a preface, an introduction, an index, and a bibliography?
   • Does it have appendices?
   • Does the information answer your question?

3. Authority
   • What are the credentials of the author, publisher, editor and other contributors?
   • Are they experts in the field of the information you are examining?
   • What is the education, reputation, and background of the author, publisher, and editor?

4. Completeness/Objectivity
   • Is the purpose clearly stated in the preface? Are there limitations?
   • Are all sides of a subject presented?
   • What is the time period?

5. Timeliness
   • What is the date of the information provided in the book or article?
   • Has the work be revised or updated?
   • Has the information changed? How important is currency for your subject?

For More Information on Evaluating Information go to:

• Cornell University Olin & Uris Libraries
  http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/webeval.html

• Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries Evaluating Information Found on the Internet
  http://guides.library.jhu.edu/content.php?pid=198142&sid=1657518

• University of California Berkeley Library Evaluating Web Pages
  http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html