

Glendale College Library Information Competency Workshops

Critical Evaluation of Web Resources - Outline

Core Competencies:

- Locate and retrieve information by:
 - Recognizing key elements of call numbers and URLs, and using them to locate library materials and Web sites.
- Evaluate information by:
 - Distinguishing reliable and unreliable sources of information, scholarly and popular sources, substantiated facts and points of view.
 - Assessing the authority, accuracy, relevance, reliability, completeness, and timeliness of information

Evaluation Criteria

NOTE: Do not give workshop handouts to students until after the first activity and discussion of criteria for evaluating web information.

Begin the workshop with a problem-based activity that will encourage students to come up with a list of evaluation criteria. **(12 min. total for 1-4)**

1. Guide all students to the *online materials* page for this workshop:
<http://www.glendale.edu/library/instruction/LibWorkshops/CritEvalWebOnline.html>
2. Have students link to the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* Web site. Ask them to take a few minutes to examine the web site **CAREFULLY** and as **THOROUGHLY** as possible in the time allowed, by following as many of its links as possible, etc. While they're reviewing, have students think about and be prepared to answer two questions: 1) Is this web site an appropriate resource for a college research assignment, that is, does it lead you to useful information? 2) What are the things about it that make you think it is, or it isn't? **(5 minutes)**
3. Discuss their answers. As they come up with evaluative criteria write them on the board. Students usually come up with at least some of the big five criteria: authority/credibility, accuracy/reliability, coverage/purpose/audience, objectivity/bias, currency/timeliness. Students come up with the ideas; you may have to help them articulate them. **(4 min.)**
4. Once you have established some criteria for evaluation of sources, take a minute or two to ask students why it is important to evaluate sources. Maybe they will come up with some of the following: **(3 min.)**
 - a. As a researcher, it is important to be a critical thinker.
 - b. In order to understand and interpret information, you must always be asking yourself questions.
 - What is it?
 - Who created this information?
 - For what purpose was it created?

Now give students the handout.

6. There are a lot of questions to consider in evaluating web sites. Discuss the strategies for answering the questions that the criteria pose: **(20 min.total for all of #6)**

- a. Have students look at the *How to Read a URL* information on their handouts (page 1) Go over it with them briefly. Then have students look at the four URLs on the online materials page— WITHOUT opening the actual web sites. As a group see what they can determine about each of the four URLs (i.e. content, source, domain, etc.). Then open each of the four Web sites to see how accurate their “educated guesses” are.
- b. **Evaluation of the Hit List:** demo a search: “global warming” “climate change” in Google gives a nice first 10 results page. It has a variety of domains represented and of course, a Wikipedia entry comes up which gives you the opportunity to discuss Wikipedia as an academic source with the students. Analyze these first 10 results with students, pointing out that on the hit list there is:
 1. URL information,
 2. title of Web site,
 3. placement on the list (ranking),
 4. possible familiarity with the site,
 5. use of particular words

Do this activity together as a class explaining it as one of the first steps in evaluating your search and the information you retrieve.

- c. As a group, come up with strategies and techniques for evaluation as you demonstrate the techniques below, using one of the sites from your previous hit list (the “global warming” “climate change” search). Ask students what they would do to establish authority, currency, coverage, objectivity, and accuracy. If students don’t come up with these strategies, be sure you demonstrate things like:
 - **Authority:** Cutting back the URL to discover sponsorship, finding info. about the author, etc.
 - **Currency:** Locating dates/updates
 - **Coverage:** look for “about this site” or an introduction that might give a statement of purpose and coverage.
 - **Objectivity:** this is a judgment call and is sometimes based on what you already know about a subject. Do they present both sides? BUT there might be other clues: is it a commercial page (profit motive)? Is it an organization page (crusaders' zeal)?
 - **Accuracy:** Look for documentation of sources (just like in a scholarly journal), probably at the end of the document or in a descriptive paragraph. Also, how does this page stack up against other things you have read, seen, heard?

7. Exercise: Critically Evaluating Web Sites. (25 min.)

- Tell students that of course you won't be able to answer every question for every web site, and you won't do a written evaluation of every web site you use. Still it is useful to go through the evaluation process.
- Be sure to emphasize that there are no hard and fast rules for evaluating web sites (e.g. an ".edu" site isn't always going to be the best for your research), and there are aren't "right and wrong" answers for this exercise. The idea is to use the questions to think critically about the site and decide for oneself.
- Guide students to the **Online Materials** web page; there are 3 web sites listed there for Exercise 1. I assign one site to each row in our classroom. Students may work in pairs or singly; their choice.
- Each person/team must go to the web site and explore it thoroughly, then evaluate the site using the *Criteria for Evaluating Web Information* (the page previous to the evaluation worksheet). On the worksheet students should note the title and URL of the site and summarize their conclusions about the site's quality in the different categories, noting specific evidence that supports their evaluation.
- Each team should be prepared to share their site and evaluation of it with the class
- Have as many teams as time allows present their evaluations to the group. Use these presentations to discuss how students have applied the criteria. Ask for input from other students: Do you all agree with this? What would you have done instead? etc.

8. Conclusion: Why does the library have an entire workshop devoted to evaluating **web resources**? Books, articles, published stuff in general goes through editing, peer review, fact-checking processes on its way to being published. Things you find in the library also go through the screening process of librarian selection as appropriate materials to support the GCC curriculum. Whether you are aware of it or not, you can rely on a certain level of credibility, reliability, etc. for the materials you find in our library and on our home page. When you do research on the Web, **none of these screening processes is in effect**. You bear all the responsibility for determining whether or not web sites you use as resources for your research projects are credible and reliable, appropriate, etc. I don't expect that you will fill out one of these evaluation forms for each site you consider for your research, but I hope this session will cause you to begin asking yourself at least some of these questions as you consider information sources that you find on the web; in short, to become critical thinkers.

IMPORTANT! Please remember to collect the Web Site Evaluation Worksheets from students at the end of this workshop. Students do not need to put their names on the worksheets; they will not be graded. We would like to review them for the purpose of assessment. Please leave them in the folder with your roster.
THANKS!