

Glendale College Library Information Competency Workshops Evaluation of Academic Research on the Web

Why should you evaluate web sites?

- The quality of web sites varies
- Anyone can put anything on the web
- It is YOUR responsibility to present authoritative, credible sources to support your research.
- Unlike print sources, most web sites do not go through a review process

As with print sources, you should be concerned with:

CRITERIA	Authority	Currency	Coverage	Objectivity	Accuracy
IN OTHER WORDS	Who	When	What	Why	How Well

How to Read a URL

<http://www.glendale.edu/library/research/citing.html>

1. **http://** – This defines the Internet protocol required to reach the online resource. Commonly used protocols are: http://, ftp://, telnet:// and more.
2. **www.glendale.edu** – this identifies the server name (host computer)
3. **library/research** - these are the subdirectories on the host computer
4. **citing.html** – is the file name (often describes content of the page)

Within a **URL**, the **domain** is important and can help you evaluate the contents of a Web site. Some examples of domain names are:

Domain	Meaning	Domain	Meaning
.edu	educational site	.org	non-profit organization
.com	company site	.net	network operations
.gov	government site	.ca, .uk, jp, etc.	country designations

TIP: Consider limiting your search by domain in order to target specific types of information.

Evaluation of the Hit List (also called List of Results)

Look carefully at the results that your favorite search engine returns BEFORE you open any of the Web sites. You can determine a lot about a web site just from the information on the hit list.

- URL information
- domain
- title of Web site
- first on the list/placement on list
- you know the site
- the use of particular words

Criteria for Evaluating Web Information

Authority and Credibility

- Can the author of the site be identified? Is it clear who has responsibility for the content of the material, whether it is an individual or an organization? Is contact information given so that you can get in touch with the author or organization for clarification or more information?
- What are the author's qualifications? Does he/she list his/her occupation, years of experience, position, or education?
- What is the author's institutional affiliation, if any? Is the author affiliated with an educational institution? A nonprofit organization? A company?

Accuracy and Reliability

- Does the site appear to be well-researched?
- Are there cited references to sources of information supporting statements made or viewpoints held? Are the sources for any factual or statistical information documented so that it can be verified in another source?
- Does the site have grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors?
- If this site has links to other sites, are they quality sites?
- How does the site compare to other information (other web sites, articles, or books) you have on this topic?

Coverage, Purpose and Audience

- Are the goals of the site stated? Is there a mission statement or statement of purpose? Is the site intended to inform? Persuade? Advocate? Entertain? Sell a product?
- Who is the site designed for? What audience is the site's author trying to reach?
- Does the site contain information relevant to your research topic?

Objectivity or Bias (point of view)

- Can you tell if the site contains mostly opinions or facts?
- Is the site satire or parody?
- Can you identify any bias in the information and opinions provided?
- Is the site sponsored by a company or organization?
- Does the site reflect the agenda of a political, religious, or social group or institution?

Currency and Timeliness

- When was this information published? Does the Web page list the date it was created?
- Does the page indicate when it was last updated?
- Are there any "dead" links (links to other sites that no longer work)?

REMEMBER: The more sources of information you know, the better evaluator you become. The MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION to ask yourself is this: How does this information compare with what I already know, have read, heard, and/or seen about this subject?

Exercise I

Lots of research is being done on farming certain types of algae in order to produce biofuels that can replace fossil fuels and be relatively harmless to the environment.

Your hypothetical writing assignment is to write a research paper that answers this question: **Do you think it is possible that algae-based biofuel production has the potential, economically and ecologically, to replace the earth's current reliance on fossil fuels?**

1. For this exercise, search the web (do not use the Library's databases) to find one reliable source of information that will help you to formulate your answer to this research question. **Do not answer the question itself**, but try to find web resources that will help you to formulate an answer to it.
2. Answer the following questions as you search so that you can discuss the process you followed.
3. What search engine did you use?

4. Write your search statement here. That is, write down the exact words you entered into the search box (be very specific).

5. How many results did your search retrieve?

6. From your search results choose a web site that you think is a good source of information for your paper.
7. Think about what makes it a reliable, credible source.
8. What is the title of the web site you have chosen?

9. What are the features that make it a good, reliable and credible source for your paper?

10. How do you think the information in this source will help to answer your research question? Be specific!

Exercise II

Lots of research is being done on farming certain types of algae in order to produce biofuels that can replace fossil fuels and be relatively harmless to the environment.

Your hypothetical writing assignment is to write a research paper that answers this question: **Do you think it is possible that algae-based biofuel production has the potential, economically and ecologically, to replace the earth's current reliance on fossil fuels?**

1. For this exercise redesign your previous search from Exercise I based on our discussion of different search tools and techniques. Even if you found useful information sources with your first search, construct a different search or try some new approaches to see what new and different resources you might come up with. The purpose of this exercise is to use what you've learned from our discussion to find other sources of information.
2. Answer the following questions as you do your search so that you can discuss how you changed your search and how your search results changed as a consequence.
3. What search engine did you use this time?

4. Write your search statement here. Is it different from your first search? Be very specific.

5. How many results did your search retrieve? Do you think they are more relevant to your research topic than in your first search? How?

6. Choose another web site that you think is a good source of information for your paper.

7. Compare it to the site that you chose for Exercise I based on all the following criteria:

- Authority and credibility _____
- Accuracy and reliability _____
- Purpose, coverage, and audience _____
- Point of view or bias _____
- Currency or timeliness _____
- What new information does this site contribute to your research? _____