Information Literacy – Evaluating a Website

Guiding Question: Do you think everything on Internet is accurate? How do you decide?

Website evaluation is based on:

1. Authority and Accuracy
2. Purpose and Content
3. Currency
4. Design, organization, and ease of use

Authority and accuracy:

Anyone can create a Web site. It is important to find out the author's *identity* and his or her *qualifications* or *expertise* in order to determine the credibility and reliability of the information.

A Web site author can be a person (Jamie Oliver), a commercial company (.com), an academic institution (.edu), a government agency (.gov), a nonprofit organization (.org), a network of computers (.net), a military site (.mil), or a country-specific (.uk) site.

Ask the following questions:

- Who is the author? Can you tell by the domain (e.g., .com or .edu) or Web address?
- Is the information reliable? What qualifications or expertise does the individual or group that created the site have?
- Does the Web site provide a means of communicating with the author or Webmaster (e.g., email or postal address, telephone number, etc)?

Purpose and content:

Some sites provide links to information (e.g., About Our Organization or a Vision Statement) detailing the purpose in creating the Web site. The purpose of other sites might not be obvious at first. Take the time to thoroughly explore a Web site to determine if the information is mostly subjective (biased or opinionated), objective (factual), or mixed.

Ask the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the Web site? (Look at the *title* and *headings* for clues.)
- What is the purpose? To provide research and scholarly information? To provide educational or factual information? To entertain? To advertise, market or sell something? To advocate ideas? To persuade you? Or, is there another purpose?
- Is there a link to a mission statement or "About Our Organization" page?
- Does the site provide balanced, objective or factual information?
- Does the Web site provide subjective, editorial or opinion statements? Is the site a forum for a personal, political or ideological bias?

- Is the point of view presented in a direct manner, or is it presented in an unbalanced and unreasonable way? Are arguments well supported?

Currency:

The currency or regularity of updating information is vital for some types information and less so for others. For example, Web sites that provide historical information, such as the presidential papers of George Washington, do not have to be updated as often as sites that provide news stories or stock market information.

Ask the following questions:

- When was the Web site last revised, modified or updated?
- Is the site well maintained? Are links current and working or do they lead to outdated pages and/or error messages?

Design, organization and ease of use:

Design, organization and ease of use are important considerations. Web sites can provide useful sources of information; but if they are slow to load and/or difficult to navigate, search or read, then their contribution or usefulness will be diminished.

Ask the following questions:

- Is the Web site clearly organized and easy to read, use and navigate?
- If applicable, are "Help" or "Search Tips" pages available? Are they easy to understand?
- If the Web site is large, is a search capability provided? If so, is it easy to use?

Activity: Evaluate 3 different Hair and Makeup Websites using the form on the link below. Be prepared to discuss.

http://www.lib.umd.edu/binaries/content/assets/public/usereducation/evaluating-web-sites-checklist-form.pdf