Evaluating Information

“When you don’t know who wrote what you read or why they wrote it, you don’t know if it’s trustworthy.”


Whenever you are trying to decide whether you should use a source of information in your research papers there are a number of factors to consider:

**Authority:**
Who is the person or organization that authored the information? What are their credentials? Is there full contact information? Is there a section of the page that explains who they are (for example an “about us” link)

**Audience/Purpose:**
Why is this page here: is it a commercial site (look for .com in the URL) trying to sell you something? Is it an organization whose purpose is to inform the public? Who is the page aimed at? Is it a website meant for children? If so, it is probably not appropriate to use in an essay for a university level course.

**Objectivity/Bias:**
This can tie into the idea of authority: be aware of who is sponsoring the information on the page, they may be trying to sell you one side of a story. Look for language that is meant to persuade you, look for overt bias.

**Currency:**
When was the page written? When was it last updated? How often does it seem to be updated? Are there a lot of dead links?

**Accuracy:**
This can be difficult to verify but look for some of the following: are there a lot of spelling and grammar mistakes? Can the author be considered an expert? Does the information back up other information you have already read? Are references provided?

For more detailed information:

- [6 Criteria for Websites](#) (Dalhousie University)
- [Evaluating Information found on the Internet](#) (John Hopkins University)
- [Evaluation](#) (Purdue University, how to evaluate web sites as well as books and journal articles)
- [Evaluating Internet Resources](#) (Ryerson University)