

Quality and Credibility of Web Sites

Criteria for evaluating the overall quality of an educational web site's content

Authorship/Source

The source or authorship of a website is the most important criteria for determining if a website is credible. Anyone can publish a site, and it is not always for educational or viable purposes. Knowing who created the site helps to determine its purpose and the intent of the author. The author's credentials are also important because you want to know if they have the education or background to discuss the subject matter knowledgeably and authoritatively.

Questions to research about the authorship/source of the site:

- Who published the site ? (look for an author or site sponsor)
- What credentials does the author of the site have ? (email the author or use a search engine to look up their name)
- Is the organization affiliated with the site or its author reputable?
- Does the domain name of the website indicate that it is a personal site or part of an official website ?

Content

The content of the site is the second most important criteria for determining if a website is credible. The content of the site is the information that you are looking to acquire for your own personal use and requires the most scrutiny to determine the validity and accuracy of the site. Even credible websites sometimes have opinion pieces and can be used for propaganda purposes. Thus verifying the content with outside, objective resources is very useful.

Questions to research about the content of the site:

- Does the web page cite other credible documents or link to other credible websites ?
- Does the site have a bias or clear point of view about the subject matter ? (Read Information and its Counterparts: Propaganda, Misinformation and Disinformation <http://www.library.jhu.edu/researchhelp/general/evaluating/counterfeit.html>)
- Why was this site created ?
- Is this site simply an advertisement or used for promotional purposes ?

Currency

When determining if the quality and credibility of a site you finally must make sure that the site is presenting the most update information available.

Questions to research about the currency of the site:

- Is there a date posted somewhere that explains when the site was created or last updated?
- Are the links current or expired and broken?
- Does the site refer to information that is update ? Why or why not ?

History Websites

Evaluation 1-Credible Website: The History Channel Website <http://www.historychannel.com/>

The sponsorship of this site is the television channel “The History Channel” which is part of the international media company A&E Television Networks. This site is a multimedia information and primary resource site, with historical video clips and audio. For some of the articles on this site the credentials for the authors are not quite clear. However, there is a site editor that ensures that information is accurate. Also there seems to be no glaring editorial bias presented in the sites content, only objective up-to-date information.

Evaluation 2-UnCredible Website: Rasta Sites <http://rastaites.com/HIM/childhood.htm>

While “Rasta Sites” offers a wide array of historical information on Ancient Ethiopia and King Haile Selassie, the authorship of this site is unknown. It has a religious/social bias, since the site promotes the religious ideologies of Rastafarianism. This is important to note since Rastafarians believe that Ethiopian King Haile Selassie was the second coming of Christ, and thus information about King Selassie is written in an overly positive light. While the site appears to be continuously updated this is insignificant to the credibility of the site as an accurate information source, because much of the information is not objective nor comes from non-religious sources.