

Elements of Web Site Evaluation

Computer Literacy 1, November 2007

Authority

- What are the author's credentials? Know when credentials matter.
- Is the source known and respected?
- Is there any way to contact the author?
- Are there "back door" ways of determining authority (such as reviewer ratings, seller ratings, etc.)?

Accuracy

- Can the information be corroborated? In other words, can you confirm the information in another source?
- Does this information need to be current?
- Is the information documented, either directly or indirectly?
- Does the information belong to those who provide it?
- Do the links work?
- How is the information being used? Is accuracy a relevant criterion for recreational sites?

Balanced Treatment

Be able to spot point of view

- Is the site fair and objective?
- Is it an advocacy site? Advocacy sites are biased by definition.
- Is there a conflict of interest? Does the website producer stand to benefit from the information being provided?

How important is balance? Is it required for your purposes?

- Do enthusiasts' (hobbyists') sites, novelty sites, and advocacy sites need to be unbiased?
- Is bias necessarily a bad thing?

The Dark Side: Techniques used to deceive or mislead

- "Cloaking" identity -- acting like something you are not
- "Co-opting" symbols and traditions to use in other contexts
- Calling on a higher authority (e.g., religion, country, the medical profession, etc.) to justify a position
- Using the "plain folks" technique ("We are just like everyone else") to sell something or make yourself look more mainstream
- Employing pseudoscience - using scientific-sounding references to justify a position