

Evaluating websites

When you're surfing the Web, you probably only think about one thing when you look at a Web site: whether or not it's fun.

But when you're looking for information on the Web for school -- or really any time that you care that what you find is true and up-to-date -- you have to evaluate the website to make sure that you can trust the information on it.

Here are some questions to ask when you're looking at a website that will help you decide whether or not it's good:

Who made it?

Anyone can make a Web page. In fact, not only can anyone make a Web page, anyone can make a Web page and lie about who they are! You could make a Web page that said you were Eminem, and no one would stop you from putting it on the Web. But sites that really belong to the people they say they belong to have some things in common:

1. There's some way to contact the people responsible for the site; usually an e-mail address, sometimes a phone number and street address, too.
2. Pages within the website look similar: they may have the same background color, or there will be the same logo on every page.
3. Pages within the website link back to the home page, and to elsewhere in the site.
4. The website shows signs of being *proofread*; there are no spelling or grammar errors.

If you're going to use information from a website for a school project, think about getting it from a website that you already know will have good information, such as the website of a library, a school, or a museum. Often, libraries, schools, and museums will have links on their sites to other sites that they have already evaluated for quality and accuracy. The Multnomah County Library Homework Center (www.multcolib.org/homework/) is a good place to start.

When was it last updated?

Look for a 'last updated' date near the top or bottom of the site's home page. If a website has been updated recently, that's generally a good sign. It means someone's paying attention to the site, making sure links still work, maybe changing parts of it to reflect more recent news or research. But it's not always

necessary for a website to have been updated recently for it to be valuable. For instance, if a website provides the full text of Shakespeare's sonnets, that text isn't going to change, so it's not necessary for it to be frequently updated.

Is it clear what it's about?

You should be able to tell why a website exists, and what information it's trying to provide. If the purpose of the website is confusing or unclear, that's a good sign that you should look for a different site.

Is it easy to find the information you need?

You won't always be able to find exactly what you need right on the very first page of the first website you go to. Looking at different places and gathering information from them is what doing research means. But if it's very hard for you to find the information you need, and especially if it seems that information from one part of the website contradicts another part, you may want to try another site.