

Assignment 6: Quality and Credibility of Web Sites

Mark Rash

markrash@vt.edu

June 7, 2009

Important Considerations in Determining the Quality & Credibility of a Web Site

To evaluate the quality and credibility of an online source, answer the questions in the following tables. While not every question must be answered favorably in order to determine that a source is credible, the vast majority of the responses should be positive to establish this credibility. The importance of each criterion is also provided.

<i>The URL</i>	
Criterion	Importance
Is the page someone's personal homepage?	Brings credibility of the author into question because the site may not be endorsed by a publisher, organization, or domain owner
Does the domain extension make sense for the content? Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government sites: .gov, .mil • Educational sites: .edu • Nonprofit sites: .org NOTE: .org, country codes, and extensions not listed here are not tightly controlled.	Provides a quick glance as to the type of domain from which the page was served and ensures the domain type is appropriate for the information
Who published the content?	Ensures the information was published by a reputable organization

<i>Authorship</i>	
Criterion	Importance
Is the author named?	Establishes authority for what is said within the content
Is the author reputable?	Demonstrates the level of authority with which the author speaks on the subject
Has an independent or other source reviewed, critiqued, or otherwise verified the information?	Ensures authenticity and accuracy of the information presented
What are the overall goals and values of the publishing or authoring organization?	Provides information about the organization's stance and reputation within the subject area
Is the source available for public or private updates?	If the source can be updated by other people, the credibility of the source could be questionable
Is there any evidence of bias?	Ensures the author wrote objectively

<i>Timing and Currency</i>	
Criterion	Importance
When was the content written?	Ensures the information is timely and relevant
When was the content last updated?	Ensures the information is current NOTE: Some sites only provide the date of the latest update.
Does the document refer to clearly dated information?	Ensures the information is presented in the proper context of date, time, and relevance
Is a copyright date provided?	Establishes timeliness of the content

<i>Coverage</i>	
Criterion	Importance
Does the content reflect an in-depth understanding and presentation of the related issues?	Establishes the author's expertise on the subject area
Does the content provide references? If these references are online, are links also provided?	Provides external resources for justification, to answer additional questions, or to establish credibility
Does the content appropriately apply schools of thought, theories, or techniques generally used in the subject area?	Ensures the content aligns with generally accepted principles within the subject area
If the site presents new theories or ideas, is sufficient detail provided?	Establishes credibility of the new theories or ideas and provides an understanding of the background behind their formation

One credible webpage in the field of Instructional Technology based on the above criteria:

<http://pedagogy.merlot.org/>

The above site is considered a credible online source for the following reasons:

- It is not someone's personal homepage.
- As a nonprofit organization, the domain extension (.org) makes sense for the type of information.
- All documents are peer-reviewed and/or catalogued by members of the field.
- The organization clearly states its goals ("to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning by increasing the quantity and quality of peer reviewed online learning materials that can be easily incorporated into faculty designed courses").

- Site activities are powered by individual members, corporate partners, editorial boards, and institutional partners.
- The site is committed to the currency of its information through the use of ongoing communication with global supporters, including an international conference, the Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, news, collaboration tools, and member publications.
- Site contents do not appear to reflect bias.
- All resources provided on the site have been categorized and reviewed before they are posted.
- All resources provided on the site include the date they were added to the MERLOT database.
- The organization clearly indicates an in-depth understanding and presentation of the related issues.
- Numerous references and suggested readings are provided on the site.
- The content makes appropriate use of established theories and principles related to instruction and implications for adult learners.

An example of a webpage that does not sufficiently meet the standards provided in this document and therefore cannot be considered credible:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instructional_technology

The above site does not meet the credibility standards for the following reasons:

- The content was published by Wikipedia, which is a free portal of constantly updated information but is not a formal authority on any particular subject area, including instructional technology.
- The content has not been authenticated or critiqued by an expert or organization.
- The source is available for public updates, which means the information can be modified by anyone with access to the Internet, essentially removing any possibility of validating its authenticity or credibility.
- The site provides one external resource that appears to be a potentially credible source; however it also contains numerous internal links that also connect with other Wikipedia articles, none of which are credible references for the reasons stated above.
- The author's reputability and background are unknown.

References:

- Greer, T., Holinga, D., Kindel, C., & Netznik, M. (1999). *An educators' guide to credibility and web evaluation*. Retrieved June 7, 2009, from University of Illinois/Urbana-Champaign Web Site: <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/wp/credibility/index.html>
- Kilborn, J. (2005, January 7). *Assessing the credibility of online sources*. Retrieved June 7, 2009, from St Cloud State University Web Site: <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/research/credibility1.html>
- Regents of the University of California. (2009). *Evaluating web pages: techniques to apply & questions to ask*. Retrieved June 7, 2009, from UC Berkeley Library Web Site: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>