

**The Virtual Chase**

Teaching Legal Professionals How To Do Research

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How To Evaluate Information--Checklist



Identify the Source

► Who is providing the information?

- Check domain ownership.
 - [Whois Source](#)
 - [Utilities at CentralOps.net](#)
- Learn how to decode a Web address and detect Web site spoofing.
- Read "about us" and author bios.
- Examine links to and from other Web sites.
- Anyone can publish a Web site.

► Examples illustrating source identification:

- [GigaLaw](#) (clearly indicated)
- [AllRefer.com](#) (multiple sources different from site owner)
- [Gatt.org](#) (masked)



Discover the Source's Expertise [top]

► Is the source an expert or authority?

- Examine credentials in author bios and "about us" pages.
- Examine grammar and spelling.
- Examine links to and from other Web sites.
- Look for other publications by the author or publisher.
 - [Amazon.com](#)
 - [U.S. Copyright Search](#)
 - [Library of Congress Online Catalog](#)
- Independently verify credentials.
 - College degrees--call registrar's office
 - Professional associations--check professional directory
 - Is the person cited as an expert in the news or trade literature?
 - Has the person published articles in trade literature or peer-reviewed publications?

► Examples illustrating reputation:

✓
X

- ▶ Doug Isenberg, GigaLaw (expert)
- ▶ Bio (questionable expertise)

✓ Determine the Level of Objectivity [top]

▶ Does the source provide a balanced viewpoint?

- ▶ Examine the writing style. Is it trying to influence your opinion?
- ▶ Examine the advertising. Does it influence the content?
- ▶ Lack of objectivity does not necessarily mean the source provides substandard information. A persuasive writer intends to win your favor. S/he might use good facts and analysis to do so.

▶ Examples illustrating objectivity:

- ▶ Cancer information at the National Cancer Institute (balanced)
- ▶ Institute for Historical Review (biased; hate site)
- ▶ Not Just Another Scare (biased; undocumented claims)

✓ Establish the Date of Publication [top]

▶ Is the information current at the time of publication?

- ▶ Examine creation and revision dates. **Do not** rely on dates provided by search engines. (See It's Tough to Get a Good Date with a Search Engine)
- ▶ Review facts and analysis in historical context.
- ▶ Assess the writing for time-sensitive information. Be cautious about descriptive words such as *always, never, all, none* and *most*.
- ▶ Be aware of scripting that creates the current date (display source code to detect)
- ▶ Stay away from undated information whether it is presented as fact or commentary.

▶ Examples illustrating timeliness:

- ▶ What Is "Fair Use" in Copyright Law? (dates clearly indicated)
- ▶ Secondhand Smoke: The Big Lie (questionable information at time of publication)
- ▶ Breast Cancer Statistics (undated facts and commentary)

✓ Verify What the Information Claims [top]

▶ Can you find two or more reliable sources that provide the same information?

- ▶ Use primary sources (sources that originate information) for facts.
- ▶ Secondary sources (sources that interpret facts) should provide cited references.
- ▶ Look for cited references.

Christopher Center Library Services

Evaluating the Quality of WWW Resources

Using the World Wide Web to find information on a topic can be both rewarding and frustrating. It can be very useful for researching certain topics, but almost useless for others. The search engine you are using may not interpret your query the way that you wanted it to or thought it would. You may turn up "0" hits, 300, or over 1000.

Why is it often difficult to find relevant, useful information on the Web?

How do you find the best information on your topic?

What are the criteria by which to evaluate Web pages?

Exercises and worksheets for Web evaluation

Links to further sites on Web evaluation

Sites useful for evaluating print resources

Bibliography for evaluating Web resources

Why is it often difficult to find relevant, useful information on the Web?

Anyone may publish on the Web, and the information that is found there may not be accurate or objective. It is "unfiltered", whereas print resources usually are evaluated at least one or more times before you read them. What are the main differences between print and Web resources? Print resources are filtered by the publisher, with the assistance of competent editors. Reputable publishers provide the assurance of quality and authority. The publisher's name is clearly stated in a print resource, whereas determining the publisher (sponsoring group or organization) of a web document is not always easy. Much of the scholarly information in print today has been "peer-reviewed" examined by a group of experts in the field), or issued under the aegis of a scholarly group. Therefore, it has gone through another filtering process, and that is a further assurance of accuracy. If you are used to using the library for research, the material in libraries' collections is chosen by librarians who use certain selection criteria as a guide, and thus the items chosen are again filtered. Furthermore, an electronic document can be altered very easily, so what you read on the Web may not be the original document, whereas changing/revising a print publication is a more complicated and costly process. For all these reasons, it is crucial that you be critical of the information you retrieve from the web. (Patterson, par.5-9)