



## Internet Sources—Choosing and Evaluating

### Source Selection

Try to select sources that offer as much of the following information as possible: author's name, author's title or position, author's organizational affiliation, date of page creation or version, author's contact information. Bookmark the source, and if you plan to use the source, be sure to record the author(s), title of document, the electronic address, date of publication, date of access, part or section heading or number, type of source, web page/site, e-mail, etc.

Various organizations rate web sites. For example, The Argus Clearinghouse at <http://www.ipl.org> has topical guides for locating resources with a rating guide for the sources. The Clearinghouse is a good place to begin your source selection.

### Source Reliability

The authorship of an Internet source is the most important factor in evaluating its reliability. Is the document signed by an author? Is a URL or e-mail address provided? Is the author an organization/association? Is the source an authority on the subject? Are the credentials of the source specified? Does the author list a professional affiliation, occupation, educational background, or organizational position?

Can the credentials of the source be identified? Check the home page of the web site (delete all information in URL after server name). Run a search with author's name in quotation marks. Check organization/association via Scholarly Societies Project (<http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/society/overview.html>). Run a search with name of organization/association in quotation marks.

Use anonymous sources only for illustrative examples or lay testimony, and then cite them as coming from an anonymous Internet document. Is the source trustworthy and at least relatively unbiased? What person or site referred you to this source? Does the person/site have a reputation for providing reliable information? Does the author/organization have a vested interest in the information? Is the intention simply to inform or to persuade you to do/believe/buy something?

### Information Credibility

Is the information intended for an educated adult audience? Is the source of statistical data identified? Is the information recent? Is the document dated? Look at the footer on the last page. Are dates of information within the document provided? Check text of document. When was the document last updated? Is information referenced within the text to other sources? Can you cross check this?

Is there a bibliography available, or are links to other documents provided? What other material can be used to verify the information? How does the material compare with other information in the field? Is the information consistent or does it contradict itself? Is the material a fact or an opinion? Does the information seem to be objective and balanced?

Are differing points of view presented? Is there more sizzle than substance in the document? Does the information seem extreme or too good to be true? Is the writing clear or unnecessarily obscure? Is the source reviewed by other sources? If so, are the reviews favorable?

Reference: "Internet-Specific Resource Evaluation Questions" by Suzanne Osborn, Mid-West Basic Course Directors Conference, February 1997;  
"Searching the Web: General and Scientific Information Access" by Steve Lawrence and C. Lee Giles, NEC Research Institute, 1998;  
[Online! A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources](#) by Andrew Harnack and Eugene Kleppinger: Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston, 2000.