

Evaluating Web Pages / Web Sites

Below are two pages. One has correct information, the other one doesn't. Which one would you believe?

Topic: Internet History

- <http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/brief.shtml>
- <http://dogme.burningman.com/~jeremymb/ioih/>

How would you go about evaluating these sites?

ASK:

1. *What type of site is this?*
2. *Who wrote the information & Does the author have authority (expertise) in this area?*
3. *Is the information current?*
4. *Does this site have quality information?
Can I find indicators of quality information?*

Step 1: What type of site is this?

What does the web address tell you about the site- The real address to a web site is a series of Internet Protocol (IP) numbers, such as 206.220.43.93 (which is the address to the MTV homepage). Remembering numbers is much harder than remembering www.mtv.com. This is where a domain name registries come in.

What is a Domain Name Registry:

Domain name registries like www.godaddy.com keep track of domain names and assign them to specific IP address. When you type in www.mtv.com in your web browser, in the background your computer looks up www.mtv.com and translates this into 206.220.43.93 (the web address connected to www.mtv.com). Different domain name registries are in charge of the various domain names (.org, .com, etc). The *Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers* (ICANN) oversees all of this.

Why is this important? All web sites belong to a top-level domain, like .org, .com, .gov. This top-level domain can clue you in to the purpose of the web site. Top level domains are either generic OR country specific. Generic means the TLD is for a group of related sites (such as .com is for companies).

Look at the following web addresses:

<http://www.lausd.net/clas>

<http://www.redcross.org/donate/donate.html>

http://www.parliament.uk/about_commons/about_commons.cfm .

Each contains a:

- top-level domain (TLD) - .org, .net, & .uk. The TLD will either be two characters (a country TLD) or three characters (a generic TLD meant to represent a specific type of site).
- second-level domain (SLD) - usually a name representative of the organization, such as lausd, redcross, & parliament.

Here is a list of common generic TLDs:

Note: The list is sorted into two groups: restricted and not restricted. Restricted TLDs (also known as sponsored) are only open to groups that fit certain parameters.

Non-restricted (also known as un-sponsored) are open to anyone.

Restricted (sponsored)

- **.edu** -- educational site, post high school university/college (restricted)
- **.gov** – U.S. governmental/ non-military site (restricted)
- **.mil** – U.S. military site (restricted)

Non-Restricted (non-sponsored)

- **.net** – networks (generally internet service providers (ISPs) & organizations, but even schools or school districts, for instance www.lausd.net (unrestricted)
- **.com** -- commercial site (unrestricted)
- **.org** –non-profit organizations (unrestricted)

There are many other generic TLDs. For more information, go to <http://www.icann.org/tlds/>. Generic TLDs are either sponsored or un-sponsored.

Word of caution: Most TLDs are un-sponsored, meaning there are no restrictions as to who or what organization/company may register that domain name. While it is true that not all .org sites will really be non-profit organizations (because the .org domain is un-sponsored and there are no restrictions when registering), generally speaking most .org sites will be non-profit organizations.

Country TLDs:

Two-digit top-level domains are known as country TLDs and signify a specific country.

Here are some examples.

- **.us** – United States (restricted)
- **.uk** –United Kingdom (restricted)
- **.ar** -- Argentina (foreign registration permitted)
- **.mx** – Mexico (foreign registration permitted)

For a listing, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_code_top-level_domain .

What does this all mean?

- A generic top-level domain can clue you in on the purpose of a web site. For example, a .com site will have a different purpose than a .edu site.

- A generic top-level domain can also help in evaluating when you ask *Does this domain make sense for this content?* For example, www.whitehouse.gov is a more credible source of information on the White House than www.whitehouse.com .

- A country top-level domain lets you know you are probably viewing a web page hosted on a computer in another country.

Step 2: Who wrote this information? Does the author have authority (expertise) in this area?

Is this a personal site?

Look for clues in the web address. For example, the ~ in the address, such as www.csulb.edu/~mmcphee usually indicates that this is a personal site (as opposed to a site created by someone on behalf of the educational institution CSU, Long Beach). The use of the word *members* in the address, such as members.aol.com/mmcphee is another clue that you are probably looking at a personal page. In fact, any time you see a personal name, such as “mmcphee” it is probably a personal page.

Why is this important? It is important not to get confused into thinking a personal site is really a site from an organization or institution. A personal site might be useful if you are wanting *personal* opinions, whereas an organization’s site would be more useful if you wanted *organizational* opinions or information.

Does the author have authority (expertise) in this area?

You see a Heart disease article on WebMd reviewed by doctors at the Cleveland Clinic? Is this a reliable article? To answer that, you need to know who the Cleveland Clinic is.

Do you know what the Cleveland Clinic is? If not, you will have to research to find out whether they are authoritative. That is, unless you can trust that the source of the information, in this case WebMd, is a reliable source of information. Thus, questions to ask include *Do you know who this person or group is?* and *Is your experience that they have been a reliable source for this type of information in the past?*

Example: Do you consider MTV to be authoritative when it comes to popular music? Likewise, do you consider MTV to be authoritative when it comes to stem cell research?

The key is whether the person or group has expertise in that specific area. For example, a professor of science at a major institution might have expertise and authority, but that doesn’t mean the professor has expertise and authority in all subjects (such as math).

3. Is the information current?

Certain topics are constantly changing. For example, an article on stem-cell research written even 5 years ago is probably outdated.

Unlike books which have a publication date, people put things on the Internet without specifying when it was put there. If there is no created, last updated or modified date, then you have to ask whether this might mean the information is outdated.

4. Can I find indicators of quality info?

Who is linking to the web site? Try a **link:** search in Google to see if any other sites link to this site. Caution: Just because other sites are linking to the site does not make it reputable. Ask: Are these reputable sites?

Is the information on this site documented? For example, if an article on a topic, are the sources for that article documented (works cited or bibliography). Is there a list of resources for further research (books and articles for further research on the topic, links to other web sites, etc.)?

Is there a clear reason why the information was published on the web (can bias or point of view be determined)? People and groups put sites on the Internet for a purpose. Figuring out what their purpose was for publishing the site is half the battle!

Web Page / Site Evaluation

Web Address: _____	
Title of Web Site _____	
Your research topic: _____	
1. What type of site is this?	
What is the top-level domain (tld)? Note the TLD can be generic (ex.: .com, .org) or country (ex.: .mx .us)	_____
If generic, is this a sponsored or un-sponsored TLD? Note: If un-sponsored, it is possible that the domain name doesn't accurately reflect the domain type (e.x.: .org, .com).	<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsored <input type="checkbox"/> Un-sponsored <input type="checkbox"/> N/a
Does the domain type make sense for this content?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Other Information:	
2. Who wrote this information? Does the author have expertise in this area?	
Who is the author (not webmaster, but might be an organization/company/group, etc):	_____
Is the site a personal page: Look for ~, members, users, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
- If not a personal page, do you have heard of this group before and do you trust them as a quality source of information on <u>this</u> topic?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
- If a personal page or if no to the question above, can you verify the person or group has expertise or authority in this area?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Other Information:	
3. Is the information current?	
Can you find a date last modified or updated?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
- If no, does the date matter (depends on type of information; for current topics, consider whether newer this information might be outdated).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Other Information:	
4. Does this site have quality information? Can I find indicators of quality info?	
Do other sites link to this site?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
- If yes, are they reputable sites?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Is the information on this site documented (works cited, bibliography, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Can you verify the information through another source?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Why is this information on the Internet? <input type="checkbox"/> To inform/educate <input type="checkbox"/> To sell <input type="checkbox"/> To persuade <input type="checkbox"/> To entertain <input type="checkbox"/> unable to determine	
Other Information:	
<i>Based on the information above, should I use this web site for this topic?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No