# Evaluating Web Pages

## Authority
- Is there an author? What are their credentials? Is there a way to contact them?
- What organization is responsible for the content? Are they reputable?
- Is there a link to more information about the author or organization?
- If no author or organization is noted, are there any other ways to determine the page’s origin? (i.e. a header or footer showing affiliation; info from the URL and domain name)

### Why is this important?
- The web is an open medium. Anyone with any level of expertise can publish on the web.
- Authorship and the qualifications of an author can be difficult to determine.

## Accuracy
- Is the information reliable and error-free? (Facts, spelling, grammar, etc.)
- Can you tell if someone fact-checked the site – is there an editor?

### Why is this important?
- Web resources rarely have fact-checkers unless the sponsoring organization does.
- No web standards exist to ensure accuracy.

## Objectivity
- Is there a bias or slant to the information presented?
- Is the page designed to sway opinion?
- Is there any advertising on the page? How much? What kind?

### Why is this important?
- The goals of the author or organization may not be clearly stated. Advertisement is often masked as content on the web.
- The web can serve as a virtual soapbox – determining fact from opinion can be difficult.

## Currency
- Does the page display a date or copyright? When was the last update?
- How current are the links? Are any broken?

### Why is this important?
- Publication dates give a sense of whether the site is ‘active’ or whether it is an orphan site.
- Dates may indicate when the site was last updated, but also when the material was first written, revised, or published on the web.

## Coverage
- What topics are covered and how in-depth is the coverage?
- Is this a site aimed at a broad audience or a specific one?
- To what other pages does the site link? Is the information presented clearly and effectively?

### Why is this important?
- Pages that link to irrelevant content or are badly organized and presented are similar to a poorly written and cited paper.
- As with print sources, a very specific page may indicate a deeper knowledge of the subject. However, be wary of ‘fan’ sites with no credentials.

### A quick primer on domain names:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.com</td>
<td>“commercial” A for-profit site selling you something (including information, i.e. nytimes.com)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.net</td>
<td>“network” Usually similar to a .com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.org</td>
<td>“organization” A non-profit (perhaps still selling something – opinion, ideas, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.edu</td>
<td>“education” An educational institution, college, or university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.gov</td>
<td>“government” Sponsored by the U.S. Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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