Website Evaluation

Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

Gary H. Jones, Ph.D.
Western Carolina University
Credibility is defined as the quality or power of inspiring belief. The English word comes from the Latin word *credere*: to believe, trust.

A resource that is credible is one which shows evidence of authenticity, reliability and believability. Basically, the key to credibility is trust...

From [http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/wp/credibility/](http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/wp/credibility/)
Eight Criteria

1. Authority
2. Accuracy / Reliability
3. Objectivity
4. Currency
5. Comprehensiveness
6. Design & Layout
7. Ease-of-Use / Navigability
8. Usefulness
Authority

- **URL information?** Type of domain? Personal page or site?
- **Can you truncate back to basic domain?**
- **Sponsor or publisher?** *(Note: [http://www.allwhois.com/](http://www.allwhois.com/))*
- **Links to third-party support for the information presented?** *(& vice versa. In Google Search, link:url.url)*
- **Identifiable author?**
  - *(Credentials? “About Us” Google the author?)*
- **If an organization, credentials of others given?**
- **Contact information?** *(street address, email)*
Accuracy / Reliability

- Reviewed?  (Part of an edited or peer-reviewed publication?)
- Verifiable?  (Can factual information be verified through footnotes or bibliographies to other credible sources?)
- Documented sources?  (Scholarly journals or otherwise reliable sources? Hyperlinked “webliography” of cited sources?)
- Fit with existing knowledge?  (Based on what you already know about the subject, or have checked from other sources)
- Responsibility?  (Is it clear who has the responsibility for the accuracy of the information presented?)
- Endorsements?  (Does an institution or internet provider support or endorse the information?)
- Data?  (Is statistical data labeled clearly; source provided?)
Objectivity / Purpose

- Ironic or satirical? Parody?
- Bias? (due to author’s or organization’s affiliation)
- Minimal (or no) promotional material
- If an organization, mission/membership stated?
- Publication, Web page or parent site directed towards a particular audience?
- Inflammatory or provocative language?
- Sufficient evidence for conclusions drawn?
Further Note on Bias

- Bias can be very subtle, and subtly pervasive
- Holistically, take perceived *accuracy, authority, reliability & purpose* into account
- Your own general knowledge; critical thinking
- If a controversial issue, are both sides presented?
- Still, difficult to detect subtle forms of racism, ethnocentrism, political bias, etc…
- What do recognized directories say?
  
Currency

- Most recent update of page?
- If article, date of article (as distinct from page)?
- Links still active?
- Do the links point to current information?
- Dates of external link checks noted?
Comprehensiveness

- Broad perspective or viewpoint of the topic
- Links to appropriate array of related internal and external documents
- Again, if controversial, both sides presented?
Design & Layout

- Is the site searchable? (internal search engine)
- Usefulness of information?
- Overall site design? (layout, typography, images, consistency, appropriate balance of graphics to text)
- Error-free? (grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, etc.)
- Load time (appropriate amount of graphics and multimedia)

Disclaimer? Privacy statement? Consideration of users with disabilities?
Ease of Use / Navigability

- Ease of Use  (User-friendly with effective interface?)
- Navigable, with clear paths?
- Well organized?  (e.g., is there a site map?)
Usefulness of Information

- All of the above, considering your purpose.

On to a few examples…
Some Examples

- Dihydrogen Monoxide: [http://www.dhmo.org](http://www.dhmo.org)
- Ruritania: [http://homepages.udayton.edu/~ahern/rurindx.htm](http://homepages.udayton.edu/~ahern/rurindx.htm)
- Families Against Censorship: [http://www.netfamilies.org/](http://www.netfamilies.org/)
- Tropical Minnesota: [http://www.lme.mankato.msus.edu/mankato/mankato.html](http://www.lme.mankato.msus.edu/mankato/mankato.html)
Crib Conclusions

- Remember the 8: CACADUNO
  \((Cur / Auth / Cov / Acc / Des / Use / Nav / Obj)\)
- Credentials are Key (check offsite sources too)
- URL is a Clue (domain name & “allwhois”)
- Check Links, Out & In (Google = link:url.url)
- Read the Fine Print (“About Us”, etc.)
- Understand *Bias* vs. *Bogus*