Questions to Ask When Evaluating an Internet Source

Accuracy
Almost anyone can publish a web site, and no standards for checking accuracy have been fully developed. Here are some questions to ask when evaluating for the accuracy of a site.
* Does the author cite the sources of information he or she used to develop the site?
* Is it possible to verify the legitimacy of these sources?
* Does the background of the author indicate knowledge of the subject covered?
* If the site is research-based, does the author clearly identify the method of research and the data gathered?

Authority
Because publishing on the Web is so easy, determining the author's expertise relevant to the topic covered is essential. Ask yourself the following questions to determine the author's credibility.
* Do you recognize the author's name?
* If you don't recognize the name, what type of information is given about the author?
* Position?
* Organizational affiliation?
* E-mail address?
* Biographical information?
* Was the site referenced in a document or web site that you trust?
Remember: If the author's name is not evident -- BEWARE! If the author's name is present, sometimes it is difficult to determine the author's credibility. Determine the level of importance the author's expertise is to the overall site.

Objectivity
Any published source, print or non-print, is rarely 100% objective. The Internet has become a highly utilized arena for all types of publishing. Determining the author's point of view or bias is very important when evaluating a web site.
* What is the purpose of the web site:
* Is it advertisement for a product or service?
* Is it for political purposes?
* Is it trying to sway public opinion on a social issue?
* Do you trust the author or organization providing the information?

Currency
Being aware of the currency of the information given on a web site is pertinent to the overall evaluation of a site. The currency of the information presented is crucial if the top covered updates rapidly, such medical or travel information. However, keep in mind that not all types of information need to be dated within the last 6-12 months.
* Is a date clearly displayed?
* Can you determine what the date refers to?
* When the page was first written? When the page was first posted on the Internet?
* When the page was last revised or updated?
* The copyright date? Find out more about copyright issues.
* Are the resources used and information provided by the author current?
* Does the page content demand routine or continual updating or revision?
* Do the links on the page point to the correct Internet site addresses?

Coverage
The last criteria included in this tutorial is coverage. This can be difficult to determine because the nature of a site's coverage may be different than a print resource. However, you should examine these points.
* Are the topics covered on the site explored in depth?
* Are the links in the site comprehensive or used as examples?
* In the site, are the links provided relevant and appropriate?
* How useful is the information provided for the topic area?