Evaluating On-Line Sources: Checklist for Students

### When deciding whether to use a source or not, you need to:

### critically analyse details about a source - be suspicious

### recognise where to find relevant details.

### Using the following checklist will help you determine whether or not an on-line source is suitable.

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| What is the URL? |
| Is it a personal page or site?*Look for names in the URL, or words such as ‘users’ or ‘members’* |  | *If it is a personal page, remember to do further investigation on the author. Personal pages may be opinion pieces, not necessarily based on reliable evidence.* |
| What kind of website is it? | €.com €.net €.gov €.org €.edu €.au €other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | *Is the type of website appropriate for your research? This may help you determine if the site is for profit, educational, commercial etc. Which type is most suitable for your research?* |
| Authority and Currency |
| Who is the author? Is it an individual or an organisation/association?*Look for sections on the website called ‘About us’ or ‘Background’. This can sometimes be found at the top of the page, in the side menu or at the bottom of the page.* | € individual\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(*Name)*€ organisation/association\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*(Name)* | *Is there enough information about the author or the organisation?**If not, you may need to do some extra research about them.**Just an email is not usually sufficient to determine reliability.* |
| What are the author’s credentials?*Look in the ‘About us’ or ‘Background’ sections. Is the author an ‘expert’ in this area? If it is an organisation or association, are they well known?*  |  | *Remember, anyone can post to the Internet without necessarily having a reliable background in the subject. Not being able to find this information on the website may lead you to question its reliability.* |
| Which other sites discuss the author/organisation?*Do a web search for the author/organisation. What do people say about them? What kinds of sites mention them?* |  | *Often you can find out about someone’s background or organisation’s information from doing a quick web search. However, you always need to be aware of the reliability of the source of the information.*  |
| Which other sites use the website?*Use link:URL* *in a search engine to discover what other pages link to the page you are evaluating. Copy and paste the URL of your website after link: (without spaces).* | € not many links€ many links€ unreliable links€ mainly academic links | *Some websites are not linked by/to any other websites. Others are linked to sites which are obviously personal or commercial. This may lead you to question the reliability of the page you are evaluating.* |
| Is it current? *What’s the date on the website? When was the article written? Look at the top or bottom of the article to find this information. It can sometimes also be found connected to the copyright information of the article or in the URL.* | € Yes € NoDate: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | *If you cannot find the date, you need to be suspicious of when the information was put on the website. This may also lead you to question whether the website is still being maintained.* |
| Accuracy  |
| Is the information accurate?*Can the information in the article be checked? Is there proof? Look for in-text references or a Reference List/Bibliography.* | € Yes € No€in-text references €Reference List/Bibliography€Other | *Most academic or scholarly work that you will use for your research will include some kind of referencing of other sources. This is to provide reliable evidence of their claims. If referencing is not evident, or if the references are out-of-date or not reliable, you may need to question your source.* |
| Are there links to other sources on the same topic?*Check the links. Do they work? What types of sources do they link to?* | € Yes € NoDo the links work?€ Yes € NoDo they link to reliable sources?€ Yes € No |
| Objectivity |
| Is the information balanced? Are all sides of an issue presented?*Read the information carefully and identify the different arguments presented. Does the author explain all sides or only their opinion?* | € Yes € NoIf no, what is the bias? | *Often, pages give links to other sites that have similar views to their own. However, a webpage that is trying to present an un-biased opinion will often also give links to sites that offer differing views. If there is no objectivity, it may lead you to question the evidence the author is presenting.*  |
| If there are links to other sources, do they illustrate other opinions?*Check the links. What are the main ideas? Are they the same as the author’s or are they different?* | € Yes € NoIf no, what is the bias? |
| Evaluation |
| Based on the above analysis: |
| What is the purpose of the web-site? | € inform € sell € explain€ share € argue € persuade€ other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | *You need to consider the purpose of a website and whether it is appropriate for how you are using it.* |
| Should I use it as part of my research or investigation? | € Yes € No | *Remember, using sources that are not reliable or overly biased will have a negative effect on your work. If you are still unsure about your source after completing this checklist, it may be safer not to use it.* |