

Evaluating Resources—the Internet

Just because something is found in the Web does not automatically mean that it is accurate, credible, or especially usable for research. As most people know, Google and other search engines look for web sites, blogs, images, and all other types of web entities. Some of the information identified through Google or other web search engines is of good quality, but some is not. For example, *Wikipedia.org* is a useful site, but has limitations and should not be used as a completely authoritative, credible source. The reason is that anyone can create or modify an article. While this can lead to a collaborative building of knowledge, it can also lead to inaccuracies.

The databases available through the Library websites are different in that information found through these is verified, reviewed, usually published, and much is copyright protected. In other words, it is basically the same as that found in published sources such as magazines, journals, books, and government reports. **Published materials are generally reviewed for accuracy by an editor, or in some instances a group of experts, before being made available.**

Another difference is that the databases on the Library webpage are part of the Private Web (which is part of the Deep Web). **Google or any other general Web search engine is unable to provide this information.** Because most of the content in these databases is published and copyright protected, it is controlled access and only available by using the Library web page links. As students through VHCC, you have access to these databases.

The following guidelines may aid in evaluating resources

Scrutinize the information for credibility

- ***Is the information supported by evidence or documented?*** Does the web page contain statistics, findings, facts, lists of references used, or other
- ***Is the information fact or opinion?*** Be careful, opinions may be presented as facts
- ***Does anyone have access to edit and freely change the information?*** Is the site a Wiki? If anyone can change or edit material at will, this can lead to questionable credibility

What is the purpose of this web site or publication? Is it commercial (.com), educational (.edu), government (.gov), nonprofit organization (.org), personal (usually .com). Other options can be .net, or letter combinations such as .nc.us or .on.ca. Sometimes individuals and organizations may have a particular cause they support or a bias towards certain ideologies. Others are outright commercial sites selling products. For example, it would not be recommended to go to an oil company's web site for completely impartial information about the oil industry. Education, government, and sometimes organization sites may be more unbiased, but one still needs to look at the information with a critical eye.

When was this site last updated? Is the site being kept current and up to date?

Do the documents on this site follow basic rules of grammar and spelling?