

THE 5WS OF WEB EVALUATION

1) The **Who?** question is linked to evaluating the Web site's **Authority**. When you look at a Web site critically, you should try to decide if the author is credible. Sometimes the author of the page is not expressly written, but you should still be able to see who sponsored the information found on a Web site, and so the sponsor should be evaluated. **You might also ask:**

- Can you tell who the author is? If not, what organization is sponsoring this Web site?
- Is the author/sponsor well-regarded in this field?
- Is there a place on the Web site where you can contact the author/sponsor?
- Are you led to additional information about the author? A place of work? Biographical info?
- How did you get here? Did you link to this site from a site you trust?

2) The **What?** question is linked to evaluating the Web site's **Objectivity**. When you evaluate a Web site, it is important that you attempt to determine what the purpose of the site is. While researching the Internet, you should look for sites that are designed to inform, not sell or persuade. *You should note whether the author is writing with a minimum of bias.* **You might also ask:**

- Is this page mostly fact or mostly opinion?
- Does the author attempt to over-generalize or simplify information as to detract from fact?
- Do any of the facts appear out of context? Are they applied in a way to persuade you?
- Are there links to the organization sponsoring the page? Or, does this seem like a lone person trying to voice his/her opinion?
- Is the page actually an advertisement disguised as information?

3) The **Where?** question is linked to noting the **Accuracy** of the information. You should be wary of Web sites that do not cite where they got their information, or provide links to other Web sites that corroborate or add to what they are saying. You should investigate the citations and evaluate them as well! Valid Web sites are free of spelling and grammatical errors as well. **You might also ask:**

- Does the author let the reader know where the information came from? Did he/she provide citations?
- Do the citations appear to be accurate and valid?
- Can you double-check the citations because the author linked to them?
- Does the author provide links to related Web sites you can use to continue your research?

4) The **When?** question is linked to discovering the **Currency** of the information. A credible Web site should include the date that it was created and the date it was last updated. You should ask yourself if it is important that you use the most current information available. If yes, then you need to look carefully at the Web site to make sure this is one that you should use. **You might also ask:**

- Does the date this Web site was created appear on it somewhere?
- Can I tell when this information was last updated?
- If not, can I tell how old the information is by the language used in the writing? the citations?
- Does it matter to me whether this information is outdated? Why?

5) The **Why?** question is linked to evaluating what **Coverage** this information has across the wide spectrum of the Internet. You need to look for information that is corroborated by other sources, at the same time however, you also need to find information that is unique, and/or different from what you have already found through research. **You might also ask:**

- Does this Web site provide valuable information? Or, should I keep researching?
- Is this new information to me? Is it something I haven't yet discovered?
- Can I corroborate this information, meaning, can I confirm its reliability by finding similar information elsewhere, from places I trust?